Liberal Protestants and Urban Renewal

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A recent spate of scholarship has revived N. J. Demerath's claim that liberal Protestantism[1] exerted more influence over American culture and society than the shrinking membership of mainline denominations after 1960 would suggest.[2] Although some of these historians disclaim any interest in explaining this decline—which, after all, has received its fair share of anguished attention over the years—most have zeroed in on the internal, often self-critical tensions that loosened what Demerath termed the "structural sources of [its] cohesion" and their subsequent impact on the actions and beliefs of liberal Protestants. Their explanations for these tensions often point to the influence of secular ideas—existentialism, 1950s social criticism, the counterculture—or to the Church's[3] engagement with social movements such as pacifism and civil rights.[4]

This article addresses a factor in the postwar evolution of the Church that seldom appears in this scholarship: the Church's encounter with the process and effects of the urban renewal programs that remade U.S. cities during that period. This encounter linked both the problems afflicting urban America and liberal Protestantism during this era and the strategies for resolving them. Despite national prosperity, the exodus of investment, jobs, tax revenue, and population to outlying regions had punishing consequences for central city economies and social conditions. Likewise, the suburban exodus of middle-class whites weakened the already tenuous presence of liberal Protestants in the central city even as national attendance and membership reached their highest recorded levels. The concept of renewal—understood by secular planners as the physical and, consequently, social reconstruction of the urban environment and by liberal Protestants as a perpetual process of self-reflection, repentance, and revitalization, both personal and institutional—promised a solution to both problems.[5]

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A small but influential minority of liberal Protestants became renewalists, clergy and laypeople who viewed deteriorating urban neighborhoods as an opportunity to renew the Church and its engagement with the world. As such, they constituted one part of the broader twentieth century ecumenical movement that, as described by scholars such as Michael Kinnamon, envisioned a broad reconciliation of denominational divisions and a revitalized "total" ministry to parishioners, including the social, economic, and political forces that shaped their lives.[6] Many renewalists, initially at least, embraced urban renewal as a corollary to their strategy for Church renewal in the central city. But their experience with redevelopment soon prompted them to question this supposed relationship. As more renewalists criticized redevelopment for degrading the spiritual and material lives of urban residents, especially African Americans and Latinos, they came to level the same charges against an institutional Church. Their arguments persuaded mainline denominational leaders to support, for a time at least, a more pluralist conception of society and the Church's role in it in the form of ministries geared more toward "indigenous" community development in the central cities. But these actions alienated the liberal Protestant majority, which believed such ministries undermined the Church and community cohesion. Renewalists' opponents turned this pluralist conception on its head by decentralizing ecclesiastical bureaucracies and cutting support of the renewalist ministries.

Studying this history reveals a new dimension of what Demerath and others have described as the mutual influence of culture and organizational structure within liberal Protestantism.[7] More than merely reflecting the impact of outside ideas, the experience of clergy and laypeople involved with urban renewal redefined their understanding of the Church and urban society.[8] Their implementation of this new knowledge generated both positive and negative responses from other liberal Protestants and urban residents. The results are inscribed both in the structure of the Church and, to a lesser but still visible extent, in the social landscapes of American cities.

The Emergence of Urban Renewal and the Movement for Church Renewal in Postwar American Cities

The decades after World War II witnessed the rise and fall of what the historian Christopher Klemek calls the "urban renewal order"—a movement of architects, planners, academics, and government leaders—that promulgated a new set of ideas for redesigning

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cities.[9] Urban renewal—the "redevelopment" or razing of "blighted" housing stock to make way for new building and the rehabilitation or enhancement of existing structures and landscapes—addressed the consequences of a widespread flight of capital and middle-class whites to the suburbs. These trends predated World War II, accelerated thereafter, and became impossible to ignore by the late 1940s, particularly for the working-class and nonwhite populations that increasingly predominated in central cities. Disinvestment, job loss, population decline, and the consequent erosion of municipal tax revenues had a devastating impact on municipalities.[10] Urban renewal, as promoted immediately after the war, promised a solution, even if it was not always clear who would benefit from the results.

Urban renewal emerged alongside a reform movement within liberal Protestantism that began to reassess the Church's relationship to the city. Notwithstanding the social gospel movement a half-century prior, Protestant churches had generally followed their middle-class and elite Anglo congregants to the suburbs. Indeed, one function of the metropolitan church federations and councils that emerged during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries was to coordinate this process. After 1940, the trend accelerated in almost every city across the country. A 1959 analysis by the Detroit Council of Churches, for instance, listed the following mainline church closures or relocations within the city limits over the prior two decades:

American Baptist Convention: 13 churches
Disciples of Christ: 2
Evangelical and Reformed/Congregational: 8
Evangelical United Brethren: 3
Lutheran (various denominations): 8
Presbyterian: 4
Methodist: 16[11]

Fleeing congregations often sold their buildings to immigrant or African American churches catering to incoming settlers. Among those that remained, racial integration was the exception rather than the rule. In institutional terms, the Church's suburban orientation, though requiring significant investments in church building, paid off handsomely in swelling coffers and new congregations in affluent outlying areas. Given the broader religious revival that followed the war, American religious institutions were able to report that, by the mid-1950s, overall attendance had reached its highest reported figures, even as large churches along formerly prominent boulevards such as Euclid Avenue in Cleveland were being vacated and razed.[12]

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A few liberal Protestants, however, expressed alarm at the decline of the Church in central cities. Decades of congregational suburbanization, they warned, had reduced its urban presence to the point of irrelevance, and efforts to evangelize the working-class, multiracial populations appeared isolated, uncoordinated, and weak. Some critics noted how poorly Protestant campaigns compared to those of Catholics, whose parishes remained geographically fixed, and who, on balance, were more welcoming to diverse populations, both culturally and in the provision of resources such as schools.[13] This advantage extended even beyond traditional Catholic bases in Latino and Eastern/Southern European communities. In 1953, for instance, the *Christian Century* reported from Saint Louis that Catholic churches in the central districts were competing with some success against black churches for new African American migrants, even as white Protestant churches abandoned the area.[14] Liberal Protestants bemoaned their inability to keep up in neighborhoods increasingly dominated by African Americans, Latinos, and working-class whites. "Today the Protestant churches represent a minority group struggling to maintain even their relative strength in the city's population," warned the New York City Mission Society in 1949. Protestantism, it worried, had become "the weakest of all the faiths" in the city.[15] Clearly, added another observer, mobility was the problem. "Population shifts decide church strategy," he complained. Protestant churches were generally organized "on the basis of a highly selective individual constituency rather than on the basis of the parish or community relationship. Almost inevitably this tends to make Protestantism weakest in every area of most rapid change and sharpest tensions."[16]

Church renewalists feared more than the waning influence of urban Protestantism. Global and domestic events of the time fed debates about the Church's purpose in modern American life. World War II had stirred the embers of the social gospel, prompting some Protestants to revisit the Church's mission to socially and economically disadvantaged groups. The arguments of European theologians such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Hendrik Kraemer, who had assailed German churches for choosing self-preservation over a confrontation with fascism, inspired laity movements meant to prevent the recurrence of such injustices.[17] Just as American urban planners borrowed from their European counterparts, so American renewalists imported ideas such as these and adapted them, in combination with other traditions of prophetic protest, to the domestic concerns of racism, poverty, and deindustrialization. What Harvey Cox later termed a "new breed" of clergy pushed the Church to address social justice

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issues, bringing ideas once relegated to Protestantism's radical fringe closer to the mainstream. Urban pastors and denominational officials were a key component of the new breed; their insulation from accountability to more conservative, middle-class congregations helped to enable their activism.[18]

Central cities were an obvious focus for the energies of Christians concerned about the relevance of the Church in the modern world. Drawing on both their theological understandings of modernity and secular critiques of the postwar period, many renewalists identified the urban environment as the defining context of the Church's work. Suburbs enacted segregation, not merely along lines of class and race but also by separating, spatially, the private world of family and the political worlds of business, industry, government, and commerce. As Gibson Winter, one of the most prominent renewalists of the period, argued, a Church enthralled to the suburbs became "captive" to this kind of debilitating social fragmentation and, thus, further marginalized in the modern era. The city, in contrast, embodied the totality of forces shaping modern life, in all its beauty and ugliness, hope and despair. Its social spaces represented the ideal, and perhaps the only, site on which to base an ecumenical movement for renewal. As Walter Kloetzli, a prominent Lutheran renewalist, put it: "If modern man survives, presumably he will live as a city dweller. . . . If the traditional institutions are to be part of that survival, they too must learn how to survive in the city." "It seems to me that the Church faces 'life or death' decisions at the crucial point of involvement in urban development," added Meryl Ruoss, another urban-oriented denominational official. If Protestantism abandoned the city, it conceded its irrelevance to modern society. But a Church that engaged these forces enacted in multiple dimensions the unifying goal of the renewal movement—by binding city and suburb in mutual concern for the disinherited; by bridging the work of various agencies and institutions that each addressed one part of a person's needs while ignoring the whole; by healing denominational schisms through associational structures that could prefigure a more complete church unity; and, most importantly, by offering a unified, ecumenical ministry to the total—religious and material—needs of human communities.[19]

These convictions prompted a small but growing number of mainline congregations, on their own or at the urging of denominational leaders, to remain in the city. Some of these, of course, were African American and Latino churches whose congregations had fewer opportunities to move to the suburbs. Others were white churches clinging, in what one pastor described as a "Mayflower

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complex," to a decaying edifice that had long before "pioneered" Protestantism in the district, with little interest in their new neighbors. But a number of middle-class white churches redefined their mission to serve the parish—that is, local community residents, regardless of church membership, race, or ethnicity. In a few cases, such as the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples in San Francisco and the All Peoples Christian Church and Church of Christian Fellowship in Los Angeles, renewalists built new churches specifically for interracial congregations.[20]

These conventional—in structure, at least—churches were joined by a smattering of more unusual efforts devised by a cadre of energetic young renewalists who believed that urbanization had rendered traditional ecclesial models obsolete. They designed a new set of "experimental" ministries, sometimes drawing on European models, sometimes on their own ingenuity, to fit the communities they served. In 1948, for instance, several students from Union Theological Seminary launched the East Harlem Protestant Parish in the kind of dense, mostly black and Latino neighborhood where liberal Protestantism had historically struggled. The parish attempted to mimic the more successful independent Pentecostal churches in that neighborhood by combining a storefront operation—which placed them directly "on the street" rather than hidden behind a conventional church edifice—with a team ministry, settlement house-type services, and a willingness to engage local politicians and public officials. The effort achieved great acclaim among liberal Protestants and, within a few years, had spun off counterparts in Chicago, Cleveland, and New Haven, Connecticut. Other experimental efforts followed, including industrial missions (another concept imported from Europe), cooperative parishes, and specialized "action-training centers" to prepare clergy and laity for work in urban environments.[21] In various ways, each of these ministries addressed a larger goal of the renewal movement—by providing mechanisms for suburban congregations to support inner city work, by offering an institution to coordinate parishioners' engagement with various social agencies and government bodies, by funneling the resources of different denominations into a common campaign, or by giving parish residents, in theory at least, a religious home that was not separated from other dimensions of their lives.

Church Renewalists Embrace Urban Renewal

Initially, at least, many renewalists greeted urban renewal with enthusiasm, for its language seemed to speak directly to their

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longstanding concerns about the Church and urban life. Comprehensive city planning appealed to those Protestants long frustrated by the lack of interdenominational coordination and consequent "overchurching" (the concentration of churches in areas above effective demand). Surveys and comity programs had been part of Protestant practice for most of the early twentieth century. Advocates of these techniques, such as H. Paul Douglass, the field director of research for the Federal Council of Churches, urged congregations to "adapt" to urban conditions by addressing local social conditions and coordinating denominational strategies. For him and many church officials, ecumenical renewal meant, in no small part, eliminating the inefficiencies of denominational fragmentation.[22] Several metropolitan church federations had tried to develop a comprehensive planning process, but complications abounded when dealing with the denominational bureaucracies, not all of which would participate.[23] Once again, the Catholic church, with its unified hierarchy, large churches, and broad civic engagement, highlighted Protestant shortcomings. Planning advocates such as David Barry, the director of the New York City Mission Society, compared the strong staffs, drawn heavily from the neighborhood population, of Catholic parishes with the anemic staffs of Protestant churches, often a single pastor imported from a rural area.[24]

In this light, the comprehensive approach of urban renewal seemed to answer the plea that had echoed through dozens of Protestant church surveys: "the need for a master plan."[25] Planning, both as a professional process and a kind of technological knowledge, would harmonize the urban landscape and allocate resources where they could benefit both the Church and city residents. The work of Douglass and his colleagues bore in its social science methodology a strong resemblance to that of urban planners, and their exhortations frequently referred to the benefits of Churches' cooperation with city planning agencies.[26]

Urban renewal only made these claims more urgent, for the imminent redrawing of urban landscapes required that Protestants make their needs known to planners. "Planners plan poorly" for churches, warned John Shope, the research and planning director for the Church Federation of Greater Chicago, if left to themselves; they either ignored the role of religion in community life or misunderstood its needs. The Church risked being left out if it did not assert itself in the planning process. Part of the problem, he added, lay in the Church's failure to develop "scientific data," interdenominational cooperation, and an organizational relationship with planners. Adopting the strategies of secular city planners, in Shope's view, could help to prepare churches for the unpredictability of the modern

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urban environment.[27] Church officials recognized their lack of technical planning knowledge and the business skills that accompanied it; beginning in the 1950s, various denominations and Church bodies conducted or commissioned studies to familiarize themselves with the details and concepts of urban renewal.[28]

But the attraction of urban renewal extended beyond these practical concerns. More than a few liberal Protestants found a concordance between the city planners' language of renewal and their own. Each promised to address the "total life" of the community, to consider the multiple forces and institutions that shaped the lives of modern city residents. "The goal of urban renewal and the goal of the church focus on the human individual, his welfare, his chance of happiness and his fulfillment of a meaningful existence," asserted one renewalist report.[29] Planners resembled Protestant renewalists in their capacity for self-reflection, their willingness to identify flaws in their approaches to redevelopment or mission work and correct them, added another.[30] Such sentiments recapitulated the long modernist tradition in liberal Protestantism, and the affinity among some renewalists for technical knowledge and its practitioners sometimes seemed particularly well-matched to an ecclesiology that envisioned not simply recovering lost territory for Protestantism but also remaking the Church in its entirety.[31]

Evidence of this conviction appeared in statements that used one form of renewal to critique another. A *Christian Century* editorial from 1956, for instance, deployed the metaphor of city planning to rebuke the latent racism of many Protestant congregations. The United States had become a "crucially impoverished mission field," the writer asserted, because the Church made the same sort of error as the first generation of city planners, who assumed that one good plan produced a perpetually harmonious city. Each failed to understand that "no city is ever completed," that the continual evolution of urban environments demanded a persistent campaign against the forces of decay and retrenchment. If urban renewal addressed this phenomenon by targeting blighted areas, the editorial concluded, then Christians must recognize that "spiritual blight [racism], which is far more dangerous than physical deterioration, has moved in where we thought everything was secure."[32] A decade later, professor Ruel Tyson described the prescriptions for the Church in Harvey Cox's *Secular City* as "Urban Renewal in the Holy City," while spokespeople for Fifth City, a renewal ministry sponsored by the Ecumenical Institute in Chicago, flipped the critique on its head by describing their work as a better and more "comprehensive alternative to other attempts at urban renewal."[33] Each of these invocations deliberately

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conflated urban and church contexts to emphasize a unifying impetus for renewal that transcended, theoretically at least, the sacred/secular divide.

Such comparisons led some renewalists to see the fate of urban renewal and of Protestantism in the city (and, perhaps, in its entirety) as intertwined. For Lyle Schaller, director of Cleveland's Regional Church Planning Office, urban renewal made Church renewal imperative should it hope to survive in the urbanized future. "Urban renewal poses the greatest challenge yet faced by American Protestantism," he wrote in 1961. "The response to the challenge may result in substantial changes in the traditional organization and structure of Protestantism."[34] The language of renewal, in both its sacred and secular forms, provided a framework for understanding how Protestantism, theologically and politically, could repair the metropolitan community. At least some of them expressed the hope that, through a strategic deployment of both kinds of renewal, the Church could simultaneously alleviate injustice in the city *and* buttress its institutional base.[35]

The advent of urban renewal thus prompted a number of renewalists to cultivate relationships with redevelopment agencies and other local government bodies. Occasionally, it was the planners or city officials who invited Church bodies and leaders to consult on new projects and initiatives; they viewed clergy and denominational officials as natural and safe—compared to more radical members of the urban working classes—representatives of city communities. "Urban renewal works more effectively," Pittsburgh's city planning director contended, in an illustration of this logic, "when churches spur the community's consciousness toward helping in such areas of social concern as social maladjustment, physical deterioration of buildings, economic problems caused by automation, changes in political structures and lack of effective leadership."[36] But more often, Church organizations tried to elbow their way to the table by invoking the responsibility and privilege of religion. The indivisible relationship between spiritual and material needs, they argued, mandated the participation of the Church in urban renewal. "The church cannot plead for abolition of slums and request exemption from the authority which takes action," one renewalist asserted.[37] "We are convinced that there shall be a responsible Christian involvement in decision making at every community level so that the city of tomorrow will not be simply a random collection of brick and paving," stated another. "We recognize that the physical city reflects, in many respects, the degree to which the spirit of God moves through man."[38]

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Ministries to Housing Projects

In the early years of urban renewal, Church renewalists focused much of their hope and concern on the housing project. On the one hand, these projects seemed inhospitable to liberal Protestantism; they concentrated large numbers of people, accelerated transiency, and fostered new kinds of communities, such as those composed of senior citizens, in ways far removed from traditional congregational models.[39] These features, combined with the sheer size of housing projects and their disruption of traditional community ties, were the flip side of suburban social fragmentation and isolation. Renewalists believed that ministries to the projects required a strategy commensurate with the social implications of the form. Kenneth Miller of New York City's Protestant Council cited urban historian Lewis Mumford's observation that the "free-standing house" expressed a Romantic period ideal of the isolated individual that no longer applied in the contemporary metropolis. "The traditionally individualistic approach of the Protestant Church to new families in the parish," he continued, "is not only inapplicable to the new type of housing; it is simply not permitted by project managements." Since housing project administrators tended to limit evangelization within the spaces of the complex, the "instant" community of a large, socioeconomically homogenous resident population required more "immediate satisfaction" of its religious needs than small, slow-growing churches could provide.[40]

On the other hand, housing projects offered opportunities as well. Renewalists described them as "new" and "unified" communities. In drawing these adjectives from planning language, they believed the promises (broken, for the most part, in retrospect) that project designers had accounted for the totality of human needs in their work and that the projects would be integrated socially, racially, and economically. Renewalists surmised that housing projects could serve as a "source of ecumenicity" because integration would break down loyalties to "ethnic" churches that tended to limit the success of liberal Protestantism in multiethnic districts. Missions to the projects could bring about interdenominational cooperation in practice without necessarily triggering debilitating theological debates.[41] With parochial alliances rendered obsolete, liberal Protestant churches would be free, as one Lutheran report put it, to "assume the full measure of responsibility over every segment of our population."[42]

Some concluded further that such a development would lead to the demise of their competition for Black Belt residents. In a report titled, none too subtly, "Opportunity Negro," the Chicago Church

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Federation speculated that redevelopment in the Black Belt might benefit mainline denominations at the expense of the independent storefront churches that were more popular with African Americans. Redevelopment agencies would raze the storefronts, they reasoned; only churches with "a substantial building of considerable value, or an extremely active congregation with financial resources" would be spared. With their competitors eliminated, the federation could offer up its member churches as the only viable alternative.[43] Housing developers may have allocated limited space for churches, but mainline denominations had reasons to believe they and Catholics would be first in line for coveted spots. Such predictions were born out at Chicago's Altgeld Gardens project, built in the 1940s, where developers designated space only for a Catholic church and the Missionary Society-sponsored United Church. The federation was wrong about the demise of its competition; residents quickly formed their own Baptist, Church of God, and spiritualist congregations. But with no dedicated meeting area, these grassroots congregations had to assemble in apartments or find a nearby storefront that had been spared the wrecking ball.[44]

Renewalists mounted various other efforts to extend their presence into housing projects. The Protestant Council of New York drew up a list of every housing project in the city and its adjacent (member) churches in order to encourage and coordinate ministries to those populations. At least some local congregations took the initiative to contact their new neighbors. Soon after the end of World War II, for instance, Olivet Presbyterian Church in Chicago conducted an outreach program in Chicago's Francis Cabrini Homes and recruited several new members despite the racial tension in the project's vicinity. Fourteen years later, one observer commented that the project seemed "well churched," with a variety of congregations of different denominations catering to residents.[45] In other cases, denominations or supra-congregational bodies established churches specifically for housing project residents. The New York City Mission Society built two such churches; one of them, the non-denominational Church of the Open Door, was erected on the grounds of the newly completed Farragut Housing Project in Brooklyn in 1953. Open Door incorporated the congregation of an existing church whose building had been razed to make way for a new expressway. In Pittsburgh, Methodists established Bethany House, a church and social welfare ministry, adjacent to a housing project in the Northview Heights district.[46] Variations on these strategies appeared across the nation: one Presbyterian agency, in 1965, counted more than two dozen different examples of churches and ministries directed specifically to residents of public housing projects in various cities.[47]

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The Renewalist Critique of Urban Renewal

Generally speaking, the Protestant embrace of urban renewal in the 1940s and 1950s was strongest among denominational leaders, administrators, and journalists who prioritized comprehensive planning. Clergy and congregations on the ground, so to speak, were more likely to have second thoughts after the first major phase of redevelopment got under way. Urban renewal projects were located disproportionately in black and Latino neighborhoods, but redevelopers did not necessarily spare white churches from eviction.[48] Even middle-class districts could face the bulldozer, especially as freeway construction began to connect downtown with outer residential areas. Proximity to redevelopment could be almost as devastating as removal if construction displaced or cut off churches from their members. Indeed, the "freeway revolts" of the 1950s and 1960s often centered in middle-class neighborhoods that had more resources to fight city hall.[49]

Liberal Protestant congregations remaining in the city realized, by the mid-1950s, that their denominational leadership's enthusiasm for planning did not necessarily translate into influence over city planners. In New York, the massive, autocratic schemes of Robert Moses caused particular consternation among renewalists and others for wiping out large swaths of the city, including some districts that did not remotely qualify as "blighted." One observer complained that Protestant churches in redevelopment zones were treated "as any other structure"; reprising once more Protestant insecurities, another argued that the size of the Roman Catholic church gave it more leverage than fragmented Protestant denominations with redevelopment authorities and other government offices.[50] City churches must be ready to move at all times, complained minister Theodore Spears of New York's Central Presbyterian Church in 1962.

> In the current world, the church is always left well in the rear by the real estate authorities. Projected housing developments, whether public or private, do not take the church into their confidence. With many other community agencies, we suddenly learn that new buildings are to go up here or there, or somewhere else. The church is the tail on the kite of the real estate boom. It is whipped about by forces which it must follow but cannot control, and by which it is not consulted.[51]

The sense of helplessness expressed here followed not only from policy decisions but also from their economic consequences. Without outside aid, displaced congregations could seldom rebuild in the same neighborhood because payouts for eminent domain seizures rarely matched the new, higher value of the land following redevelopment.[52]

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Renewalists experienced even more directly the impact of urban renewal since they had by design entered the black and Latino neighborhoods most likely to be targeted for clearance. The East Harlem Protestant Parish and its offshoots, for instance, each faced during their early years eviction from buildings and/or the displacement of significant numbers of their parishioners to make room for redevelopment projects or freeway construction (the New Haven chapter, originally called Oak Street Christian Parish, had to change its name when freeway construction obliterated its namesake and forced its relocation). And within the Church, renewalists in urban ministries were among the first to protest the treatment of city residents by redevelopment agencies and municipal government.[53]

Close-up experiences with urban renewal helped to shape the outlook of those who worked hardest to develop urban strategies for the Church. Renewalists, most of them white and middle class, sympathized deeply with their largely nonwhite and working-class parishes; their cultural and theological orientation led them to choose that calling over other options available to them, and outside events, such as the civil rights movement in the South, further influenced their thinking. But experiences at their ministries—which often included witnessing the poor treatment of their parishioners by landlords, employers, police officers, and redevelopment officials—shaped their perspectives as well. In addition, the renewalists' obvious difficulties relating to African Americans, Latinos, and, for that matter, working-class whites, encouraged them to look for other ways to appeal to city residents. Simply put, many of the new urban churches failed to engender the parish response their sponsors had anticipated. The United Church at Altgeld Gardens, for instance, was, in its pastor's words, "not as successful as hoped"; the independent churches attracted more followers despite lacking designated meeting spaces.[54] Even Archie Hargraves, one of the few black clergymen to lead a renewal ministry in the early years of the movement, struggled to compete against storefront preachers adjacent to the East Harlem Protestant Parish.[55]

These difficulties encouraged renewalists to channel their energies into different ways of relating to parish residents; promoting community empowerment was an obvious option. The African American civil rights movement in the North had emphasized this principle for some time, and community organization models such as Saul Alinsky's Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) appealed to at least some renewalists as a means of engendering community revitalization and providing a role for the Church.[56] That this process often involved identifying renewalists' own complicity in injustice (at least to the

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extent that many of them belonged to the white middle class) before challenging it helped persuade them that they were engaged in a more theologically grounded practice of renewal.

Among other things, this practice offered an opportunity for reconciliation with nonwhite liberal Protestants. The first and most sustained critiques of urban renewal within the Church came from nonwhite churches and clergy. Marginalized within their denominations and often worshiping in segregated churches, black and Latino Protestants quickly realized that many city officials and private developers saw urban renewal as a means of removing nonwhite neighborhoods.[57] They thus helped to mount some of the first sustained, organized resistance to "slum" clearance. In Detroit, for instance, Nicholas Hood, the African American pastor of Plymouth Congregational Church, spearheaded the formation of the Fellowship of Urban Renewal Churches in 1961 after developers of a new medical center slated Plymouth and several other black churches for demolition. Many members of the fellowship were small storefronts, either independent or affiliated with black denominations, yet together they secured the right for at least some churches to rebuild in the area, and Hood helped to coordinate the depositing of church funds in a black-owned bank that was more willing to grant mortgages for the purpose.[58] The impact of this effort reverberated throughout Protestant Detroit, and not only with sympathetic urban pastors. The Detroit Council of Churches had been focusing its energies on coordinating the suburban exodus of white churches, but it realized that the formation of groups like the fellowship challenged its own authority; shortly thereafter, it reorganized itself to devote more resources to social concerns and to advocate for more Church input into redevelopment.[59]

Not all renewalists embraced this cause, and those who did challenge urban renewal opened up fissures with the Church. In the early 1960s, for instance, the *Christian Century* picked a fight with IAF organizations in New York and Chicago that opposed redevelopment projects, even going so far to tar Catholic supporters of those groups as "demagogues" and segregationists. In both cases, however, mainline clergymen involved with the IAF fired back, refuting the anti-Catholic charges and endorsing the community organizations' contention that redevelopment was punishing, rather than aiding, the areas' black and Latino residents.[60] These disputes revealed the growing ambivalence within the Church about urban renewal as its toll on working-class city residents was becoming apparent even to those living outside the redevelopment zones. In June 1962, Lyle Schaller laid out for *Christian Century* readers the ways in which developers in Cleveland benefited from these projects at the expense of the displaced. He then accused the

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Church of complicity in the schemes, of viewing urban renewal "as a potential developer of land rather than as Christ's agent for the renewal of people."[61] Schaller spoke the mind of other renewalists who decried Protestants' lack of critical perspective when he wondered: "Does the church have anything to say with respect to Urban Renewal?"[62]

But if arguments such as these seemed to break the link between urban renewal and Church renewal, those such as Schaller, who had witnessed the worst aspects of redevelopment, were, nonetheless, unwilling to forsake it entirely. Don Benedict, perhaps the most politically radical of the East Harlem Protestant Parish founders, believed American cities were "doomed" without the investment brought by redevelopment, notwithstanding, he acknowledged, the damage it had done to East Harlem.[63] The perceived necessity of urban renewal led some liberal Protestants to advocate a mediating role that would prevent venal interests from subverting the nobler objectives of urban renewal and public housing. Speaking of social problems exacerbated by housing projects, the director of a church-sponsored community house in Cleveland offered up a vision for Church engagement steeped in the language of renewal:

> The Church has the opportunity of stepping out of the role of listener and sectarian participant and into the role of spokesman for an entity that stretches across the whole society and is able to act in relationship to human problems that are not changed because they are housed in cinder block instead of clapboard. This would not be an ecclesiastical exercise in passing judgment on city planners and government agencies. Rather, it must be a participation [*sic*] by the Church in assessing the total society whose majority view becomes the pressure point and standard for the planner.[64]

In practice, this stance meant that renewalists began to advocate conservation and rehabilitation, combined with less destructive forms of redevelopment, as strategies superior to razing large swaths of land and displacing large populations. It also meant that they began to protest redevelopers whose projects fell short of their stated concerns for working-class urban residents.[65]

This new and more prophetic stance marked an important step in the education of renewalists about urban affairs, but it also fit neatly within the broader tradition of ecumenical renewal that viewed self-criticism and reform as required methods to combat the sinfulness of humanity and its institutions, whether sacred or secular. Paul Tillich, whose writings influenced many renewalists of the era,

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labeled the precept that no human institution could encapsulate the will of God as the "Protestant principle."[66] By failing to minister, in a secular sense, to the "total society," renewalists argued, redevelopment agencies had merely confirmed that they shared these same faults. Confronting this realization increasingly led renewalists to orient their work not just to urban residents but also to the institutions that shaped so much of their lives. "Ministering to structures," as some termed this approach, meant engaging, through prophetic witness, if necessary, the public and private bodies that exerted power in the city to ensure they treated urban residents more fairly.[67] Renewalists, in effect, were adopting a new strategy for renewal that tried to maintain the "integrity" of the Church as a leaven on the injustices of secular society.[68]

From a Critique of Urban Renewal to a Critique of the Church

The renewalists' emergent critique of urban renewal coincided with a sharpening of their critique of the institutional Church. The renewalist ideal of self-criticism, combined with the erosion of sacred/secular distinctions fostered by the postwar ecumenical movement, meant that their disenchantment with urban renewal could translate easily to disenchantment with their fellow liberal Protestants and the Church. The grievances, increasing in intensity by the 1960s, were both old and new. Practical concerns such as ineffectiveness, Douglass's longstanding gripe, persisted from earlier periods. Some Church planners, Benedict complained, see their work as "the mere juggling of maps, census reports and statistical yearbooks."[69] But more central theological concerns about the objectives of Church planning emerged, too. Churches were "giant corporations," wrote Stanley Hallett of the Church Federation of Chicago in 1964 and, thus, just as complicit in the failures of American cities as secular corporations. They "have only to look at their relative investment in new middle- and upper-middle income suburbs in comparison to their investments in churches near public housing developments to understand the meaning of limited institutional interest."[70] One well-placed critic was Perry Norton, a professional planner, active layman, and popular consultant for Church groups. A series of collaborations and consultations with Church leaders gradually convinced him that his objectives differed from theirs. For the typical Church official, Norton wrote, planning "meant dealing principally with the problem of locating and relocating churches . . . the concern they were talking about was not the needs of people; it was rather the supposed needs of the churches—the demographic statistics about people which would

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guide them in deciding where to start, where to close, where to merge churches. The one thing we did together, therefore, was get progressively unhappy with one another." Norton held a particularly dim view of Church federations, which he believed focused too much on suburban extension, but detected similar problems in many other areas of ecclesiastical bureaucracy.[71]

This sort of critique mirrored those leveled at urban renewal—that it was autocratic, that it benefitted the privileged at the expense of the masses, that it exacerbated the dehumanization and spiritual desiccation of modern society—and, as the decade progressed, both criticisms mounted in renewalist circles. Strategies to mediate conflicts over urban renewal projects gave way to calls for self-determination for both the churches and their parishioners. Renewalists found they lacked the leverage to influence municipal politics through diplomatic means and became more attracted to the kinds of direct action techniques that characterized the IAF and the civil rights movement—picketing, for instance, redevelopment projects that had not established a firm relocation plan for displaced residents.[72]

At the same time, renewalists voiced increasing frustration with the limits placed by denominations and suburban congregations on inner-city ministries and with the reluctance of many white congregations to cooperate in their efforts. The indifference or hostility of many local churches to their objectives was a recurrent gripe. Some extant congregations, for instance, flatly objected to integration and worked to thwart the efforts of liberal urban missionaries. When the leadership at the white South Deering (Chicago) Methodist Church invited black residents of the nearby Trumbull Park housing project to attend, for instance, a portion of the congregation defected to set up a whites-only "community" church. Other churches, while not hostile to outsiders, seemed oblivious to the social and cultural issues involved in attracting them.[73]

Similarly, in the minds of many renewalists, denominations' preoccupations with suburban values of prosperity and status compromised their work in the cities. Claiming, as one tract later put it, that "church growth is not the point," these critics reprised Bonhoeffer's condemnation of a church more interested in its own welfare than in engaging the world. By the 1960s, a series of books aimed at Protestant readers propagated this broader critique of institutionalism.[74] Gibson Winter, in a follow-up to *Suburban Captivity of the Churches*, concluded that almost all aspects of the Church were in a sustained "institutional crisis." Protestantism's complicity in perpetuating inequalities of power eliminated its claim to superiority over

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secular structures, he argued; in that light, secularization—the transfer of authority from religious to secular bodies—was not necessarily a negative. Two years later, Harvey Cox and others offered up the promise of a secular city, denuded of institutional Church forms, as the best destiny for Christianity.[75] Many renewalists were not willing to go this far, but almost all of them endorsed the call to transform the Church, echoing Bonhoeffer's idea of a "church for others," from "institutional maintenance to community service." Some Protestants began to employ the rhetoric of renewal not just to churches in the inner city but also to the general reorganization of the metropolitan diocese and even the entire bureaucracy of the Church itself. Stephen Rose, the chief editor at *Renewal* magazine, which served as a key mouthpiece for this viewpoint, conceived the idea of a "grass roots church" that abandoned institutional concerns for an alliance with the poor and oppressed.[76]

Although the self-critical streak persisted among renewalists, at least a few contrasted their own efforts with the deplorable, in their view, state of liberal Protestantism. William Stringfellow, an influential theologian of the period and lay participant in the East Harlem Protestant Parish, reported that one parish clergyman "blandly explained that the Church outside East Harlem was dead and that the East Harlem Protestant Parish represented the 'New Jerusalem' in American Protestantism." Such language echoed others who began to see in the urban ministries a blueprint not only for inner-city mission but also for Church structures as a whole.[77] Archie Hargraves, the African American co-founder of the parish, wrote a pamphlet for the United Church of Christ admonishing churches to "stop pussyfooting through the revolution" and then cited examples of some churches and ministries who had done so (by, among other things, challenging redevelopment agencies).[78] When, in 1969, he told an audience at Riverside Church that the institutional Church should no longer assume it could direct social transformation but, rather, should follow the lead of "the black, the poor, and the young," he articulated the views of many renewalists who had long since concluded that a full investment in radical movements for social justice constituted, in itself, a process of personal and institutional—in the sense of aligning it with God's will—renewal.[79]

Renewalists even attacked their own ministries. Most of their architects were white, but, by the 1960s, African Americans and Latinos were agitating for more control over denominational resources dedicated to urban ministry. Nathan Wright, Jr., a black Episcopal priest, compared renewalists to colonial exploiters and denied that any of the programs had empowered communities to engage in any

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meaningful "urban rebuilding."[80] White clergy could be just as critical; in 1967, an outgoing minister from the East Harlem Protestant Parish delivered a bitter final sermon denouncing the program, for reasons similar to Wright's, as the "East Harlem Protestant Plantation."[81] When, two years later, James Forman issued the "Black Manifesto" demanding five hundred million dollars in reparations from churches, his arguments resonated among some renewalists already accustomed to flagellating the Church. Stephen Rose, for one, supported the demand not only for white society's failure to make amends for slavery and segregation but also for "the damage it is doing to blacks in the cities."[82]

Such activities helped renewalists to frame other ideas emanating from ethnic nationalist and postcolonial movements and the war on poverty, leading some urban clergy to view their role as enabling self-determination for city residents of urban renewal zones. Norman Eddy, an East Harlem Protestant Parish minister, illustrated this transition. Years of work in the district, combined with visits to Latin America, where he witnessed socially conscious, laity-led church movements, convinced him that Harlem residents preferred to organize their own communities instead of "being planned for." After an announced housing project at a site near East Harlem failed to materialize, he spearheaded the founding of the Metro North Citizens Committee in partnership with other local religious and secular groups. The committee devised a plan, eventually accepted by city government, that combined rehabilitation of existing dwellings with scaled-down redevelopment and a greater attention to community needs, as identified by the alliance.[83]

Metro North illustrated the emerging strategy by which renewalists began to work through the contradictions of their relationship to urban renewal programs in the late 1950s and 1960s. By the time it got under way, other urban pastors and congregations had already begun to create or participate in ground-up housing partnerships that proceeded from local leadership, rather than city hall, and emphasized rehabilitation, community improvement, affordable housing, and local entrepreneurship. During the 1960s and 1970s, these efforts often tapped subsidies available under an amendment to the National Housing Act for nonprofit housing development. Nicholas Hood, for instance, established a housing development corporation that built a number of projects in various parts of Detroit. He and other church leaders circulated descriptions of their experiences and advice for those interested in getting involved.[84] Renewalists prevailed upon denominational leaders to channel more funding to independent, minority-directed (and often secular) organizations as a way of promoting self-determination. Through the 1960s, Protestant

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leaders earmarked funds to secular organizations engaged in community development and empowerment, thereby relinquishing at least some control of Church resources to community control. If the religious dimension of these efforts seemed scant or nonexistent, the donors nonetheless viewed their philanthropy, in light of their experience with urban ministries, as a form of Christian witness and a renewing practice for the Church.[85]

This two-pronged strategy could still leave Protestant bodies exposed to the charge of double-dealing. In San Francisco, for instance, the local Presbyterian Synod helped to fund the Western Addition Community Organization (WACO), an IAF-style group that had challenged the bulldozing of a working-class African American district to make way for middle- and upper-income housing. WACO then discovered that another Presbyterian-based organization was sponsoring an "upper income retirement home for the elderly" in the redevelopment area, the very sort of project it was challenging.[86]

Despite these contradictions, renewalists' combative stance toward urban renewal, even when funneled through secular community organizations, proved more influential in shaping the landscape of American cities than did Church leaders' direct embrace of the redevelopment process. This influence was by no means determinative; city churches continued to face the effects of redevelopment, both directly and indirectly, during and after the 1960s. But the movement for the "democratization" of urban renewal, which reshaped the power structures overseeing redevelopment even as it dissipated their work in urban neighborhoods, drew, in no small part, from the community organizations that renewalists participated in and persuaded Church leaders to support financially.[87] And the community development programs of the late 1960s, which came to replace redevelopment during this period, often drew on Church financing and personnel. In Chicago, for instance, renewalists funded a number of community organizations, and the Urban Training Center, a leading action-training center in the renewal movement, placed its students as interns in the organizations. Other renewalists continued to serve as advisors even as they studiously avoided any decision-making roles. Two organizations, the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO) and the Joint Strategy and Action Committee (JSAC), were formed during the 1960s to coordinate ecumenical support for secular community development. They, along with denomination-specific programs, directed millions of dollars to community development organizations in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The work of these organizations was not urban renewal in the standard sense, but, in its attention to business creation, housing rehabilitation,

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and social institution building, it operated under the same philosophy of infrastructural revitalization that had guided urban renewal.[88]

Yet these concepts of renewal, by fusing the personal process of self-criticism with institutional change, became increasingly intolerable to many liberal Protestants outside the renewalist camp. Renewalists had always constituted a small minority of the mainline denominations, even though their relationship with national Church leaders gave them disproportionate influence. Other clergy and laity had generally tolerated their work in the 1950s and 1960s, in part because denominational coffers were flush and the demands of the renewalists did not impinge on their priorities. But the radicalization of the renewal movement, its challenge to the institutional Church, its advocacy for support of "indigenous" community organizations unrelated to evangelism, and the fiscal crunch that hit the denominations during the inflationary 1970s stirred the mainline majority to action. Sociologists such as Jeffrey Hadden had discerned a "gathering storm" of conflict between renewalist clergy and a much larger majority of more conservative clergy and laity by the early 1960s. The storm broke not long after, when groups such as the Episcopal church's Foundation for Christian Theology, the Presbyterian Lay Committee, and the Good News Movement in the United Methodist Church launched their own "renewal" movement against what they saw as an unhealthy obsession with social justice concerns. They sought instead to refocus renewal on personal levels more associated with traditional kinds of evangelism.[89]

These counter movements, combined with the economic downturn of the 1970s, choked off denominational funds for renewalist ministries, many of which consolidated or shut down. Though Church bodies continued to promote low-cost housing and other community development programs, tightening finances constrained their investments. Furthermore, tax policies and inflationary pressures during the 1970s rendered insolvent many of the developments that had been built, forcing sponsoring Church bodies to turn them over to the federal government to avoid bankruptcy.[90] In response, renewalists and their organizations scaled back their ambitions to focus on local efforts that drew from local support. This change followed structural reforms within the denominations to devolve granting authority from national offices to regional and local jurisdictions. Speaking about the Methodist church, Norman Dewire, the former director of JSAC, summarized these changes by noting that, in the 1950s and 1960s, support of renewalist ministries and community development programs was centered in the denominational leadership, while today it operates largely through collaborations of the

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pastors of large urban congregations.[91] Funding restrictions and conservative opposition did not prevent the Church from participating in housing projects. Denominations continued to support housing construction, including, for instance, the well-known Nehemiah Homes in East Brooklyn, through the rest of the century.[92] But these efforts mirrored the decentralization of urban renewal programs in their scaled-down expectations and greater attention to local community input.

Conclusion

Writing about an earlier period, D. Scott Cormode suggests that the growing similarity between Church and secular social structures indicated the mutual influence of each on the other.[93] In the case of postwar urban America, it is difficult to delineate the precise points of Church influence on urban redevelopment because renewalists more often sought to exert it indirectly by prophetic witness or through independent community organizations. Renewalists' frustration with redevelopment suggests that the Church's rapport with city planners seldom translated into actual clout. But many of the community organizations across the country that did finally blunt the impact of urban renewal agencies depended on Church support. And renewalist programs directly accounted for the creation of thousands of units of housing as well as the support of local businesses and other social services. A 1971 study by the Protestant Church Council of New York, for instance, concluded that the number of Church-sponsored housing units in existence or under development at that time equaled the total number of "private" units created that year.[94] If these efforts fell short of resolving the urban crisis, they did provide a lifeline for thousands of residents struggling under the harsh economic conditions of the postwar inner city, along with a tangible imprint of the Church's work on the urban landscape.

The impact on the Church is easier to discern. Renewalists' engagement with urban redevelopment initially helped to focus their vision of a unified ministry to a "total" society and, later, as a more pluralist, conflict-oriented participation in the struggle for black and Latino political autonomy. Their self-critical turn, however, alienated the majority in the mainline, thereby underscoring and exacerbating the fractures within liberal Protestantism. In his study of the contemporary ecumenical movement, Michael Kinnamon argues that the Church suffers from an excessive emphasis on pluralism and a reluctance to engage in the process of humble listening and repentance that should be crucial to renewal.[95] Of course, one cannot attribute this

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condition to the encounter with urban renewal alone. But studying that encounter indicates the ways in which the work and experience of Church members and organizations have helped to shape how they understand their environment and how they should organize their efforts to act on it, with consequent implications for both the Church and urban society. More broadly, framing religion in this manner can serve as one method for the intersecting of religious and urban histories (or, for that matter, any other form of "secular" history) that Kathleen Conzen and others called for more than fifteen years ago.[96]

Notes

1. I will be using the admittedly problematic adjective "liberal" to describe my subjects rather than others—mainline, modernist, ecumenical, progressive, etc.—often deployed by scholars. In the context of the broad renewal movement centered in postwar American cities, each of these terms captures a key feature of the movement's theology without encapsulating the whole. I settled on liberal for its familiarity and breadth, following Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 3 vols. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, 2003, 2006).

2. N. J. Demerath, "Snatching Defeat from Victory in the Decline of Liberal Protestantism: Culture vs. Structure in Institutional Analysis," in *Sacred Companies: Organizational Aspects of Religion and Religious Aspects of Organizations,* ed. N. J. Demerath, Peter Dobkin Hall, Terry Schmidt, and Rhys H. Williams (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 154–71; N. J. Demerath, "Cultural Victory and Organizational Defeat in the Paradoxical Decline of Liberal Protestantism," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 34 (March 1995): 458–69.

3. The term "the Church" refers to the imagined collective institutions of liberal Protestantism and follows the meaning of the term for liberal Protestants, particularly those involved in the renewal movement of the time.

4. See, for instance, Elisha Coffman, *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); James F. Findlay, *Church People in the Struggle: The National Council of Churches and the Black Freedom Movement, 1950–1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Jill K. Gill, *Embattled Ecumenism: The National Council of Churches, the Vietnam War, and the Trials of the Protestant Left* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011); David Hollinger, "After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Ecumenical Protestantism and the Modern American Encounter with Diversity," *Journal of American History*

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98 (June 2011): 21–48; James Hudnut-Beumler, *Looking for God in the Suburbs: The Religion of the American Dream and Its Critics, 1945–1965* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994); Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Leigh E. Schmidt and Sally M. Promey, eds. *American Religious Liberalism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012); and Jennifer Schuessler, "Religious Legacy, with Its Leftward Tilt, Is Reconsidered," *New York Times*, July 24, 2013, C1.

5. On the relationship between self-criticism, repentence, and renewal in the liberal Christian tradition, see Michael Kinnamon, *The Vision of the Ecumenical Movement and How It Has Been Impoverished by Its Friends* (Atlanta: Chalice, 2003), esp. 65–74.

6. During the period under study, the term renewalist generally referred to the most strident critics of the institutional Church. I will employ a more capacious definition that includes those who embraced many of the same ideas even if their reforms were not as far reaching as others. For an example of the use of the term at the time, see Richard E. Moore, "The Missionary Structure of the United Presbyterian Church," pamphlet reprint from *McCormick Quarterly*, March 1966, reprint in box 13, folder 9, Reuben Sheares Papers, Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, Louisiana (hereafter referred to as Sheares Papers). On the twentieth-century ecumenical movement and its concept of Church renewal, see, in addition to Kinnamon, Steven M. Tipton, *Public Pulpits: Methodists and the Mainline Churches in the Moral Argument for Public Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). Charles Taylor might explain the renewalists as one iteration of the "nova" effect, where the advent of nonreligious options for belief have prompted new formulations of faith. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

7. Demerath, "Snatching Defeat from Victory," esp. 162–66; Mayer N. Zald and John D. McCarthy, "Religious Groups as Crucibles of Social Movements," in Demerath et al. *Sacred Companies*, 27.

8. Richard White has written extensively, albeit on a very different subject than this one, about the ways in which workers' knowledge about an environment follows from the work they do on it. See *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York: Macmillan, 1996).

9. The term urban renewal replaced redevelopment to describe this effort in the mid-1950s, supposedly to connote greater sensitivity to community concerns. Some critics termed the distinction more rhetorical than substantive; I use both terms interchangeably here. Christopher

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Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal: Postwar Urbanism from New York to Berlin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Jon Teaford, *Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940–1985* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Chester Hartman, *City for Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Robert Caro, *The Powerbroker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Vintage, 1975); Joel Schwartz, *The New York Approach: Robert Moses, Urban Liberals, and the Redevelopment of the Inner City* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993); Mark I. Gelfand, *A Nation of Cities: The Federal Government and Urban America, 1933–1965* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

10. For some notable contributions to the now extensive literature on postwar urban decline, see Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Don Parson, *Making a Better World: Public Housing, the Red Scare, and the Direction of Modern Los Angeles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Robert Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Colin Gordon, *Mapping Decline: St. Louis and the Fate of the American City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Amanda Seligman, *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago's West Side* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); and Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940–1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

11. "Relocation of Churches," Department of Research and Planning, Detroit Council of Churches, January 23, 1959, box 10, folder 21, Metropolitan Detroit Council of Churches Collection, Walter Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan (hereafter referred to as MDCC). An absence of systematic recordkeeping and classification across denominational bodies makes it impossible to quantify the number of urban churches that closed or moved during this period, but virtually every metropolitan-based survey from this period collected by the National Council of Churches describes a drop in the number of mainline churches in the study area. For a few other examples that explore these trends in particular depth, see Frederick A. Shippey, "Methodism in Los Angeles and Vicinity: Trends and Characteristics," 1951, 11, 40, #1108, Harlan Paul Douglass Collection on the Church and Social Problems, microfilm collection (hereafter referred to as HPDC); Meryl Ruoss,

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Carolyn Odell, and Clara Orr, "Downtown Brooklyn: A Community Study," June 1955, #2552, HPDC; and Leland Gartrell, "The Protestant Community in Flatbush, Brooklyn," 1962, #2556, HDPC.

12. Dean R. Hoge, Benton Johnson, and Donald A. Luidens, *Vanishing Boundaries: The Religion of Mainline Baby Boomers* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 193–97; Lyle E. Schaller, "Euclid Avenue: Limiting the Church," *City Church* (May–June 1962): 3–7.

13. John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth Century Urban North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 19; Mission Neighborhood Center, "A Self-Report of the Greater Mission District in Southeastern San Francisco," November 21, 1960, 14, "SF Districts—Mission" File, San Francisco Ephemera Collection, Special Collections, San Francisco Public Library (hereafter referred to as SFPL).

14. "Sees Protestant Flight from the City," *Christian Century*, June 3, 1953, 670–71; McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries*, 56.

15. Board of Directors of New York City Mission Society, "Proposal for a Cooperative Advance Missionary Program," November 16, 1949, Box 1, Folder 1, and Pathfinding Service, "Protestant Church Planning in New York City," December 1947, box 1, folder 1, City Council of Churches of New York: Church Planning and Research Collection, Burke Library, Union Theological Seminary Library (hereafter referred to as CCNY). See, too, O. M. Walton, "Survey Points Up Protestant Slump," *Christian Century*, October 20, 1948, 117.

16. Hermann N. Morse, "Evangelizing a Procession," *Christian Century*, November 21, 1951, 1337.

17. Paul Allen Carter, *The Decline and Revival of the Social Gospel: Social and Political Liberalism in American Protestant Churches, 1920–1940* (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1956). On the influence of the war and European theology on American laity movements, see Francis O. Ayres, *The Ministry of the Laity: A Biblical Exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962); and Hollinger, "After Cloven Tongues of Fire," 30.

18. Harvey Cox, "The 'New Breed' in American Churches: Sources of Social Activism in American Religion," *Daedalus* 96 (Winter 1967): 135–50. On America's longer traditions of radical religious protest, see Daniel McKanan, *Prophetic Encounters: Religion and the American Radical Tradition* (Boston: Beacon, 2011).

19. Gibson Winter, *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches: An Analysis of Protestant Responsibility in the Expanding Metropolis* (Garden

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City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961); Walter Kloetzli, *The City Church—Death or Renewal: A Study of Eight Urban Lutheran Churches* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), 1; Meryl Ruoss, "The Church's Viewpoint," *City Church* (May–June 1957): 13–15. See, too, Kendig Brubaker Cully, ed., *Will the Church Lose the City?* (New York: World Press, 1969). Ruoss was an early observer of the housing project issue, having written a bachelor's thesis on the subject at Union Seminary. "The Challenge to Protestantism in the Developing Pattern of Large-Scale Housing in New York City" (Bachelor's of Divinity thesis, Union Theological Seminary, 1952).

20. For descriptions of the former, see Samuel L. Kincheloe, "The Behavior Sequence of a Dying Church," *Religious Education* 24 (1929): 329–45; Paul Hunsinger, "A Study of a Church in a Transition Area," n.d., RG 6, box 46, folder 4, National Council of Churches Records, Presbyterian Archives, Philadelphia, Pa. (hereafter referred to as NCC). For examples of the latter, see G. Merrill Lenox, "Downtown Parish Votes to Stay On," *Christian Century*, March 1, 1950, 285; Robert Rice, "Church," *New Yorker*, August 1, 1964, 41–60 and August 8, 1964, 37–73; Kloetzli, *The City Church—Death or Renewal*, 50–78; Homer A. Jack, "The Emergence of the Interracial Church," *Social Action* 13 (January 1947): 31–38.

21. On the East Harlem Protestant Parish, see Benjamin Alicea, "Christian Urban Colonizers: A History of the East Harlem Protestant Parish, 1948–68" (Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1989). For descriptions of other efforts, see Clifford J. Green, ed., *Churches, Cities, and Human Community: Urban Ministry in the United States, 1945–1985* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996); George D. Younger, *From New Creation to Urban Crisis: A History of Action Training Ministries, 1962–1975* (Chicago: Center for Scientific Study of Religion, 1987); and Richard Luecke, "Protestant Clergy: New Forms of Ministry, New Forms of Training," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 387 (January 1970): 86–95.

22. On Douglass's life and writings, see Jeffrey K. Hadden, "H. Paul Douglass: His Perspective and His Work," *Review of Religious Research* 22 (September 1980): 66–88. Other important works on church planning include Ross W. Sanderson, *The Strategy of Church Planning* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1932); Samuel C. Kincheloe, "Factors to Be Considered in the Founding of New Churches in City and Suburban Areas," *City Church* 2 (September 1951): 20–22, and 2 (November 1951): 5–7; and Lyle E. Schaller, *Planning for Protestantism in Urban America* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1965).

23. See Philip Smith, "Protestant Comity in Metropolitan Pittsburgh," *American Sociological Review* 8 (August 1943): 425–32; "Study

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Document for the Urban Church Consultation," Greater Chicago Church Federation, 1960, #1984, HPDC; and "Pathfinding Service for the Churches," March 10, 1947, box 1, folder 1, CCNY.

24. See, for instance, Kenneth Miller, "Protestant Strategy in New York," April 27, 1950, p. 4, box 1, folder 2, CCNY; and David W. Barry, "Mortar and Mortals," *City Church* 5 (December 1954): 7–9.

25. Frederick A. Shippey, "Methodism in Pittsburgh and Vicinity: Trends and Characteristics, 1900–1949," Division of Research and Survey, Methodist Church [1951], 80, #1204, HPDC.

26. Douglass built his reputation in Protestant circles during the 1920s and 1930s by working for and directing the Institute on Social and Religious Research, an important organization in the development of certain social science methodologies. See Sarah Igo, *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 30–33.

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ABSTRACT This article examines the liberal Protestant encounter with the urban renewal programs that remade U.S. cities after World War II. Suburbanization had punishing consequences for cities and threatened the already tenuous presence of liberal Protestants there. The concept of renewal—in both its religious and secular dimensions—promised a solution to these problems. Many renewalists, those clergy and laypeople who viewed deteriorating urban neighborhoods as an opportunity to restore Church unity, initially embraced urban renewal as a secular corollary to their work. But the interaction among ecclesial organizations, government, and inner city parishioners over its implementation exacerbated tensions within liberal Protestantism. Many who initially supported urban renewal came to conclude that its results did not match their own objectives. By supporting challenges to redevelopment from African Americans, Latinos, and other urban residents, renewalists criticized the Church for what they believed to be complicity in the degradation of Christian culture and the urban environment.

This history demonstrates the mutual influence of culture and organizational structure within liberal Protestantism and the impact of those changes on secular society. Renewalists grappling with urban renewal programs interpreted both theological and secular concepts through their own experiences with city populations, Church bodies, government, and redevelopment agencies. Their subsequent actions prompted mainline denominational leaders to support, for a time, at least, ministries geared more towards to indigenous community development. Such ministries reflected a more pluralist conception of society and the Church's role in it. Eventually, renewalists' opponents turned this pluralist conception on its head, decentralizing the church bureaucracies that had funded their ministries. An analogous process took place in the urban renewal programs themselves, underscoring the ways in which religious and urban histories intersect.

Keywords: Liberal Protestantism, Renewal, Ecumenism, Urban Renewal (and/or Redevelopment), Urban Crisis, Church and Social Problems

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