The Small Church as an Apologetic

STANLEY M. WILLIAMS

THE WILLIAMS BIBLE INSTITUTE AND SEMINARY

4441 Wesconnett Blvd

JACKSONVILLE, FL 32210

BISHOPSMW@GMAIL.COM

(904)955-1342

Word Count: 8,306

Abstract

This article argues that the small church functions as a distinctive apologetic within contemporary post-Christian culture. Prevailing ecclesial narratives, shaped by the rise of megachurches, often dismiss small congregations as weak, irrelevant, or in decline. Yet biblical theology, historical precedent, and sociological research suggest otherwise: small churches embody a counter-narrative that challenges cultural assumptions about size, success, and credibility. Drawing on scriptural motifs of remnant, weakness, and incarnation, the study shows how smallness has consistently been a divine strategy rather than a liability.

Four apologetic dimensions are examined: embodied witness, counter-cultural resistance, incarnational logic, and cultural credibility. Together, these demonstrate that small churches defend the Christian faith less through rhetorical argument than through lived authenticity, relational trust, and local presence. The paper also engages counter-arguments, acknowledging the risks of insularity, resource scarcity, and limited cultural influence. By holding these tensions in view, the article reframes apologetics as embodied plausibility communities whose very existence makes the gospel believable.

Small churches are not peripheral remnants of ecclesial decline but indispensable witnesses to the truth of the gospel. Their significance lies not in numerical strength but in faithfulness, offering a timely apologetic in a skeptical and fragmented world.

KEYWORDS: small church, apologetics, ecclesiology, post-Christian culture, embodied witness, missional theology, cultural credibility

Introduction

The dominant imagination of contemporary ecclesial life has been shaped by the logic of scale. Mega-church campuses, celebrity pastors, sophisticated branding, and global livestreams project an image of vitality and relevance. Success is measured in numbers attendance, budgets, square footage, and digital reach. Within this cultural narrative, the small church is too often dismissed as an afterthought: fragile, ineffective, or worse, a sign of decline.[1] Such assumptions reflect broader cultural values that equate size with significance and visibility with vitality, thereby embedding ecclesial life within the broader logic of consumer capitalism and celebrity culture.[2]

At the same time, critiques of the small church cannot be ignored. Many small congregations struggle with limited resources, aging memberships, and the inability to sustain robust ministries for children, youth, or outreach.[3] In such cases, critics argue, small churches risk becoming insular, irrelevant, or incapable of addressing the complex cultural challenges of the twenty-first century. The sociology of religion has repeatedly documented these dynamics, noting that declining participation in institutional religion has disproportionately affected smaller congregations.[4] From this perspective, the apologetic witness of the small church is not immediately persuasive; rather, it appears as evidence of ecclesial weakness.[5]

---

[1] Kimon Howland Sargeant, Seeker Churches: Promoting Traditional Religion in a Nontraditional Way (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000).

[2] Karl Vaters, The Grasshopper Myth: Big Churches, Small Churches and the Small Thinking That Divides Us (Newport Beach, CA: New Small Church, 2013).

[3] Scott Thumma and Dave Travis, Beyond Megachurch Myths: What We Can Learn from America's Largest Churches (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007).

[4] Lesslie Newbigin, The Gospel in a Pluralist Society (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

[5] Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009).

Yet, to reduce the small church to a narrative of failure is to miss its deeper theological and cultural significance. In reality, the very existence of the small church constitutes an apologetic. It embodies a counter-narrative to the myth that bigger is always better, demonstrating that witness is not dependent upon scale but upon faithfulness.[6] The apologetic force of the small church lies not in its numerical strength but in its ability to embody intimacy, presence, and credibility. Its scale allows for discipleship that resists the anonymity of mass gatherings. Its embeddedness in neighborhoods confronts the placelessness of digital religion. Its emphasis on mutuality challenges the consumerist posture often cultivated by large-scale religious production.[7]

The central question guiding this study is therefore twofold: Can the small church serve as a credible apologetic for the Christian faith in contemporary culture, and how do its perceived limitations complicate this claim? The apologetic potential of smallness is not self-evident but contested, requiring careful engagement with both theological sources and cultural analysis.

This article proceeds in four movements. First, it explores the biblical–theological foundations of smallness as a divine strategy, attending to remnant theology, the incarnation, and Pauline weakness. Second, it considers historical and cultural precedents in which small churches or minority communities have functioned as apologetic witnesses. Third, it develops four apologetic dimensions embodied witness, counter-cultural resistance, incarnational logic, and cultural credibility while engaging corresponding critiques that complicate their force. Finally, the article

[6] Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989).
[7] Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 66–70.

reflects on the implications of small church apologetics for contemporary mission, arguing that apologetics must be reframed less as rational debate and more as embodied plausibility.

By situating (the small church within both theological and sociological) frames, the paper argues that smallness is not a liability to be overcome but a strategy through which God's power is made manifest.[8] Far from being marginal, small churches stand at the center of Christianity's apologetic task in a skeptical and fragmented age.

Biblical–Theological Foundations

Scripture testifies to God's consistent use of the small, the overlooked, and the weak to accomplish His purposes. Israel's remnant theology highlights divine preference for faithful minority witness over numerical dominance: "In that day the remnant of Israel will lean on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth" (Isa 10:20–22).[9] This theme surfaces throughout Israel's history. Gideon's army is reduced to three hundred men "lest Israel boast over me, saying, 'My own hand has delivered me'" (Judge 7:2). The exile, far from destroying Israel's identity, sharpened it through a theology of the faithful few.[10] These texts form an early apologetic of smallness: God's purposes are not thwarted by weakness, but rather disclosed through it.

The incarnation itself embodies this apologetic. Christ was born not in Jerusalem, the religious and political center of Israel, but in Bethlehem, a town "too little to be among the clans of Judah" (Mic

[8] Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 12–15.
[9] Isaiah 10:20–22 (NRSV).
[10] Walter Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 41–44.

5:2).[11] The humility of Jesus' birth echoes Paul's later claim that Christ "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (Phil 2:7). The paradox of divine majesty in smallness and obscurity grounds the church's witness in weakness rather than grandeur. As Athanasius insisted in *On the Incarnation*, God chose to enter the world "in a human body subject to the same laws of nature" so that redemption might be wrought from below rather than imposed from above.[12] The apologetic of Bethlehem is precisely that salvation comes not by way of power, spectacle, or empire, but through the small and seemingly insignificant.

Jesus' teaching amplifies this theme. The parables of the mustard seed and the yeast (Matt 13:31–33) demonstrate that the Kingdom's power is not diminished by small beginnings but revealed through them.[13] The tiny seed grows into a tree where the birds make their nests; the small amount of yeast leavens the entire loaf. The logic of the Kingdom is not the logic of scale but of transformation. Augustine, reflecting on these parables, noted that God "chose to begin from the least, that the greatness might appear to be His work."[14] Smallness, then, is not merely tolerated in the biblical witness but celebrated as the vehicle of divine activity.

The apostle Paul extends this trajectory in his theology of weakness. To the Corinthians he insists that God's "power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9–10).[15] The cross itself embodies the

---

[11] Micah 5:2 (NRSV).

[12] Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, trans. John Behr (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011), 55.

[13] Matthew 13:31–33 (NRSV).

[14] Augustine, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, vol. 6, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 91.

[15] 2 Corinthians 12:9–10 (NRSV).

paradox: a scandal to Jews, folly to Gentiles, yet the wisdom and power of God (1 Cor 1:18–25). Paul's argument is deeply apologetic: the credibility of the gospel rests not on aligning with cultural values of power but on embodying the cruciform pattern of Christ. Karl Barth, commenting on this passage, argued that the church is called to be "the fellowship of the insignificant" precisely because its significance is grounded in God's action rather than human achievement.[16]

These biblical motifs frame smallness not as a liability but as a divine strategy for displaying God's power. They provide the theological foundation for arguing that small churches are not failures of ecclesial vitality but living parables of the Kingdom. Their credibility as an apologetic lies not in numerical strength but in their ability to embody faithfulness, intimacy, and presence.

The Vulnerability of Smallness

At the same time, the biblical narrative acknowledges the fragility of smallness. Israel's remnant theology is bound up with judgment, exile, and survival rather than institutional triumph.[17] The remnant is often defined by suffering, marginality, and even obscurity; it is not automatically a sign of divine blessing. The mustard seed may become a tree, but the parable itself recognizes that beginnings are fragile and easily dismissed. Paul's theology of weakness, while offering hope, is rooted in his own experience of opposition, hardship, and bodily affliction.[18] Smallness, then, is both a site of divine disclosure and a potential stumbling block.

[16] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/1: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 669–71.

[17] Isaiah 6:13; Amos 5:15.

[18] Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 564–67.

Patristic writers recognized this paradox. John Chrysostom, in his homilies on 1 Corinthians, emphasized that God's choice of the weak shames the strong, but he also warned that weakness without faith can collapse into despair.[19] Augustine's theology of the City of God draws a similar tension: the pilgrim city is small, often hidden, and appears weak compared to the earthly city, yet it embodies eternal truth.[20] In both cases, smallness functions as both apologetic witness and existential challenge.

Modern interpreters echo these concerns. Walter Brueggemann describes exile as a moment when Israel's smallness was both the crucible of imaginative faith and the occasion for despair.[21] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, reflecting on the church under Nazi pressure, argued that weakness and minority status should not be romanticized; they are conditions of suffering that demand costly discipleship.[22] For Bonhoeffer, the small confessing church was an apologetic only insofar as it embodied obedience to Christ, not merely because it was small.

These biblical and theological themes suggest that smallness is integral to the church's identity. The gospel is most plausibly defended not through rational proofs but through communities that embody its truth. As Lesslie Newbigin has argued, the credibility of the Christian faith rests on the

[19] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on First Corinthians*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, vol. 12, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 54–56.
[20] Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 1984), XIX.17.
[21] Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home: Preaching Among Exiles* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 23–25.
[22] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtness (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 32–35.

existence of a "plausibility structure" in which gospel claims are lived out in visible community.[23][23] In this sense, the small church's apologetic is rooted in its capacity to be such a plausibility structure. Its limited scale allows for life to be shared, for trust to be built, and for the gospel to be seen.

But the same qualities that commend smallness also complicate it. Small congregations are vulnerable to insularity, overdependence on a few leaders, and cultural irrelevance.[24] Their apologetic is fragile, easily undermined when weakness is interpreted not as divine strategy but as institutional failure. The paradox is inescapable: the small church's apologetic force is both its greatest strength and its greatest liability.

Embodied Witness

In a fragmented and digital age, small churches cultivate face-to-face discipleship, relational trust, and shared life. Their credibility lies in proximity: members know and are known, embodying the apologetic of authentic community.[25] In such spaces, faith is not abstracted into slogans or media productions but embodied in ordinary practices of worship, hospitality, and mutual care. Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon describe the church as a "colony" of resident aliens, where life together functions as a counter-witness to the dominant culture.[26] This embodied witness is an

[23] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 227.
[24] Karl Vaters, *Small Church Essentials: Field-Tested Principles for Leading a Healthy Congregation of Under 250* (Chicago: Moody, 2018), 61–64.
[25] Christine D. Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 24–27.
[26] Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 12.

apologetic because it makes the claims of the gospel visible and tangible in ways that mere intellectual argument cannot.

The biblical vision of community underscores the apologetic power of embodied life together. The early church in Acts is portrayed as "devoted to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42).[27] Luke emphasizes not only proclamation but shared meals, mutual care, and economic solidarity. This embodied life became itself a form of evangelism: "The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47).[28] The plausibility of the gospel was bound to the visibility of communal practices.

Paul's epistles also highlight embodied life as apologetic witness. He exhorts the Philippians to be "of one mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind" (Phil 2:2), rooting this unity in the incarnational humility of Christ.[29] For Paul, the gospel is defended not only in words but in the "letter written on human hearts" (2 Cor 3:2–3). The credibility of the faith rests in whether the community embodies the reconciliation, love, and mutuality it proclaims.

Jesus' own ministry modeled relational intimacy. He did not broadcast a mass media campaign but formed a small band of disciples with whom he ate, walked, and shared life.[30] This micro-community became the seed of the church. The apologetic of Jesus' ministry was inseparable from its embodied form: the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14).[31] Small churches, in

[27] Acts 2:42 (NRSV).
[28] Acts 2:47 (NRSV).
[29] Philippians 2:2 (NRSV).
[30] James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, Christianity in the Making, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 353–56.
[31] John 1:14 (NRSV).

their scale and relational closeness, replicate this incarnational mode of ministry more naturally than massive, program-driven congregations.

Theologians have long recognized the apologetic significance of embodied community. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in *Life Together*, argued that the Christian life cannot be sustained in abstraction but only in the concrete practices of prayer, confession, service, and shared responsibility.[32] For Bonhoeffer, community is not an optional support system but the very medium of Christian witness.

Lesslie Newbigin extends this argument apologetically. In *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, he contends that the decisive proof of the gospel's truth is not intellectual demonstration but the existence of a community that lives it.[33] The small church, precisely because it operates at a human scale, is able to embody this plausibility structure more directly than large, bureaucratic congregations. Its apologetic force is relational rather than rhetorical, existential rather than theoretical.

Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon frame this as counter-cultural witness: the church as a colony of "resident aliens" living in contrast to the dominant culture.[34] Small congregations, by virtue of their modest scale and limited resources, are well positioned to resist the pull of consumerism, celebrity, and individualism. Their witness is embodied in a shared way of life that cannot be replicated by spectacle or branding.

[32] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtness (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 32–38.
[33] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 227.
[34] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 15–18.

Sociological research confirms the apologetic power of relational closeness. Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* highlights the collapse of social capital in late modern society, with individuals increasingly isolated from communal life.[35] Yet studies also show that smaller, relationally dense communities foster higher levels of trust and participation than larger, more impersonal organizations.[36] Nancy Ammerman's ethnographic work on congregations demonstrates that ordinary practices potlucks, prayer groups, acts of mutual aid function as embodied apologetics, building plausibility through lived authenticity.[37]

At the same time, sociologists warn of the dangers of insularity. Small groups often create "bonding" social capital (trust among insiders) but fail to produce "bridging" social capital (connections to outsiders).[38] This tension parallels the apologetic paradox of the small church: its strength lies in intimacy, but intimacy can also collapse into exclusivity.

Critics argue that the same proximity that fosters authenticity can also breed dysfunction.[39] Small churches may become family chapels, controlled by a few dominant voices. Conflicts, rather than being diluted in a larger membership, are magnified in smaller settings. Diversity can be stifled, with difference perceived as threat rather than gift. What is apologetically powerful to some may appear cliquish or parochial to others.

---

[35] Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 65–70.
[36] Mark Chaves, *Congregations in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 163–66.
[37] Nancy T. Ammerman, *Congregation and Community* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 85–88.
[38] Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 22–23.
[39] R. Stephen Warner, "The Place of the Congregation in the American Religious Configuration," in *American Congregations: New Perspectives in the Study of Congregations*, vol. 2, ed. James P. Wind and James W. Lewis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 54–56.

Karl Vaters notes that small churches often resist evangelistic outreach not out of theological conviction but fear of disrupting established relationships.[40] This insularity undermines their apologetic witness, confirming cultural stereotypes of irrelevance. When proximity is leveraged for protectionism rather than inclusion, the apologetic collapses.

The early church provides a historical case study. House churches in the first centuries embodied intimate community that impressed outsiders. Tertullian records pagans remarking, "See how they love one another."[41] The apologetic was not doctrinal argument but embodied care. Yet history also shows the vulnerability of smallness. Schisms, heresies, and sectarianism often flourished in small, closed communities. The Montanists, Donatists, and other minority groups demonstrate how embodied intensity can tip into exclusivity and distortion.

The Black church tradition in the United States offers another perspective. Small congregations, often marginalized by segregation and poverty, functioned as apologetic communities of hope, resilience, and resistance.[42] Their embodied witness through preaching, music, and mutual aid defended the plausibility of Christian faith in the face of systemic injustice. Yet these churches also faced critiques of parochialism and limited influence beyond their immediate contexts.

[40] Karl Vaters, *Small Church Essentials: Field-Tested Principles for Leading a Healthy Congregation of Under 250* (Chicago: Moody, 2018), 73–75.
[41] Tertullian, *Apology*, trans. T. R. Glover, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931), 39.
[42] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 25–29.

In the digital age, the apologetic of embodied witness has gained renewed relevance. Amid the rise of online worship and "digital religion," scholars note that many still crave face-to-face connection.[43] Small churches, precisely because of their modest size, can offer a depth of presence that digital platforms cannot replicate. The small congregation's apologetic is that it resists the fragmentation of modern life by cultivating spaces of trust and belonging.

At the same time, digital culture has raised expectations for production value and reach. Many small churches struggle to compete with the polished media of larger congregations. Their embodied witness, while powerful in local settings, may be invisible in the broader cultural marketplace. The apologetic thus remains fragile: compelling to those who encounter it, but limited in scope.

The apologetic of embodied witness is therefore best understood as paradoxical. Its strength lies in proximity, authenticity, and relational depth. These qualities make the gospel visible in lived community, offering a form of defense that words alone cannot provide. Yet its vulnerabilities insularity, conflict, limited reach must be acknowledged. The apologetic of the small church is not automatic; it must be intentionally cultivated.

For small churches, this means practicing hospitality that breaks down insider/outsider boundaries, cultivating reconciliation in the midst of conflict, and embracing diversity as part of their apologetic.[44] It also requires reframing weakness not as failure but as theological identity. When

[43] Heidi A. Campbell and Stephen Garner, *Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith in Digital Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 61–65.
[44] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 196–99.

intimacy is leveraged for mission rather than protectionism, embodied witness becomes a powerful apologetic.

Credibility Through Weakness

The apologetic strength of the small church rests on its willingness to embrace weakness as a theological category. In embodying vulnerability, small congregations demonstrate reliance upon God rather than worldly measures of success. Their very survival in a landscape of decline testifies that the gospel is not bound to cultural metrics of growth.[45] For many small churches, endurance itself becomes a form of apologetic witness: their continued presence affirms that God's purposes are not defeated by scarcity or marginality.

The biblical narrative consistently affirms God's use of weakness as a means of displaying divine strength. Paul's words to the Corinthians capture this dynamic: "God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong" (1 Cor 1:27).[46] Paul's own ministry was marked by physical frailty and opposition, yet he insisted that God's "power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9–10).[47] Weakness, far from undermining the gospel, is the very stage upon which its truth is displayed.

This theme echoes throughout Scripture. God calls Moses, a man slow of speech (Exod 4:10), to confront Pharaoh. He chooses David, the youngest son, to be king (1 Sam 16:11). Jesus himself enters Jerusalem not with an army but on a donkey (Matt 21:5).[48] The apologetic of weakness is

[45] Christine D. Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 112–15.
[46] 1 Corinthians 1:27 (NRSV).
[47] 2 Corinthians 12:9–10 (NRSV).
[48] Matthew 21:5 (NRSV).

therefore not accidental but central: God works through what appears unimpressive to confound the wisdom of the world.

Theological interpreters have emphasized this paradox. Martin Luther's "theology of the cross" insists that God's revelation is hidden in weakness, suffering, and the scandal of the cross, in contrast to a "theology of glory" that seeks God in triumph and power.[49] For Luther, the credibility of the gospel lay in its refusal to align with worldly standards of success. Similarly, Karl Barth argued that the church's true authority comes not from institutional strength but from bearing witness to the crucified Christ.[50] The church's weakness is its apologetic, precisely because it points away from itself to the power of God.

In a culture that prizes efficiency, scale, and success, small churches embody an alternative imagination. Their weakness becomes a counter-cultural sign that challenges dominant assumptions. Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk suggest that leadership in such contexts requires cultivating "a community that embraces vulnerability as the place where God is at work."[51] By refusing to measure themselves by numerical size or economic capacity, small churches resist the commodification of the gospel. Their credibility lies in their contrast to the idol of growth.

This apologetic has particular resonance in a late-modern context marked by disillusionment with institutions. As sociologists have noted, trust in large organizations political, economic, and

[49] Martin Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), thesis 20.
[50] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/1: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 669–71.
[51] Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 54–56.

religious has eroded dramatically.[52] Against this backdrop, the weakness of the small church becomes a paradoxical strength. It is not too big to fail, nor too institutional to trust. Its vulnerability mirrors the fragility of ordinary life, offering an apologetic grounded in honesty rather than illusion.

The Risk of Misinterpretation

Yet weakness can be easily misread. Declining attendance, financial instability, or the inability to sustain robust programs may reinforce cultural assumptions that small churches are "dying."[53] The apologetic, then, is fragile: it requires theological framing to be seen as witness rather than deficiency. Without such framing, smallness can appear as failure.

Historical evidence confirms this risk. During the 19th and 20th centuries, many rural churches in the United States declined as populations shifted to urban centers.[54] While some congregations bore powerful witness in their localities, others became symbols of obsolescence. The apologetic of weakness collapsed when communities interpreted their smallness as irrelevance.

The vulnerability of weakness also extends to pastoral leadership. In small congregations, the pastor often embodies the church's credibility. If the pastor is perceived as ineffective, the

[52] Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 451–53.
[53] Karl Vaters, *The Grasshopper Myth: Big Churches, Small Churches and the Small Thinking That Divides Us* (Newport Beach, CA: New Small Church, 2013), 87–92.

[54] Bill J. Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 44–46.

congregation's apologetic suffers.[55] In such cases, weakness may not point to God's strength but to human failure.

Theological Clarifications

For weakness to function as apologetic witness, it must be theologically framed. Bonhoeffer's reflections are instructive here. Writing from prison, he described the church's calling as "being there for others," embracing weakness as participation in the cross of Christ.[56] Weakness without purpose becomes despair, but weakness embraced as discipleship becomes credibility.

Miroslav Volf similarly argues that the church's credibility depends not on triumph but on faithful embrace of marginality.[57] For Volf, exclusion and weakness become spaces for reconciliation and hope. Weakness is not romanticized but reframed as the site of God's transformative work.

This theological reframing aligns with New Testament witness. Paul boasts in his weaknesses not for their own sake, but because they reveal the sufficiency of Christ's grace. The apologetic lies not in weakness itself but in what weakness discloses: the power of God.[58]

Sociologically, weakness offers both credibility and liability. Nancy Ammerman's ethnographic studies show that small congregations often provide deep relational support, particularly in times of crisis.[59] Their lack of institutional resources can foster creativity and mutual reliance. Yet these

[55] Andrew Root, *The Congregation in a Secular Age: Keeping Sacred Time Against the Speed of Modern Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 139–41.
[56] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 381.
[57] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 212–15.
[58] Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 566–68.
[59] Nancy T. Ammerman, *Congregation and Community* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 93–95.

same limitations hinder their ability to address larger social challenges or compete in religious markets shaped by consumer expectations.[60]

Missiologically, weakness offers opportunity. Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost argue that small, vulnerable communities are often more agile and innovative in mission.[61] Their weakness frees them from institutional inertia, enabling fresh expressions of witness. At the same time, fragility can lead to burnout, overextension, and collapse. The apologetic of weakness thus requires discernment: vulnerability must be embraced without tipping into exhaustion.

History provides examples of weakness functioning as powerful apologetic. The early Christian church, marginalized and persecuted, grew not through political power but through embodied witness in weakness. Tertullian famously declared, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."[62] Their weakness did not undermine credibility; it magnified it.

The Anabaptist tradition also embraced weakness as witness, rejecting state power and accepting persecution as a mark of faithfulness.[63] Their small, scattered communities bore apologetic strength precisely through their refusal to rely on worldly strength.

The Black church in America provides a modern example. Often poor and marginalized, these congregations embodied an apologetic of resilience and hope.[64] Their weakness became

[60] Mark Chaves, *Congregations in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 212–14.

[61] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 49–52.
[62] Tertullian, *Apology*, trans. T. R. Glover, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931), 39.
[63] Harold S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1944), 25–27.
[64] James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1972), 108–10.

credibility: in the face of systemic oppression, they testified to a God of justice and liberation. Yet even here, the risk of weakness being misinterpreted as backwardness or irrelevance was real.

The apologetic of weakness ultimately requires a theology of fragile strength. Small churches must learn to interpret their limitations not as failures but as opportunities for grace. Weakness is credible only when it points beyond itself to God. This requires intentional theological teaching, pastoral imagination, and liturgical practices that frame vulnerability as participation in Christ's mission.

Practically, this means cultivating humility rather than defensiveness, service rather than self-preservation, and faithfulness rather than obsession with growth. It also means embracing partnership: small churches do not need to be self-sufficient, but can embody the body of Christ by collaborating with others. Weakness, when networked, becomes strength.[65]

Counter-Cultural Resistance

Against consumerism and celebrity culture, small churches resist the commodification of faith. Their very existence testifies that the gospel does not require spectacle but faithfulness. By resisting the logic of branding, market-driven programming, and personality-centered leadership, they embody a quieter apologetic: the conviction that the church's power rests not in cultural dominance but in fidelity to the crucified Christ.[66] In a religious marketplace shaped by

[65] John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 123–25.
[66] Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 66–70.

performance and consumption, the small church's simplicity functions as a counter-sign of authenticity.

The modern church increasingly functions within what sociologists call the "religious marketplace," where congregations compete for members in ways akin to consumer brands.[67] Worship styles, amenities, and celebrity pastors often become commodities that attract consumers more than disciples. In this context, small churches stand as a critique: they lack the resources to compete on these terms, but in doing so, they expose the fallacy that the gospel must be packaged like a product.

Eugene Peterson, reflecting on pastoral life, lamented the shift toward managerial and entertainment-driven models of ministry. He argued that true pastoral vocation lies not in selling religion but in accompanying people through the ordinary rhythms of discipleship.[68] Small churches, by their very nature, resist the reduction of the gospel to spectacle. Their counter-cultural resistance is not in grand gestures but in ordinary fidelityweekly worship, shared meals, prayer, and care.

The biblical witness itself critiques commodification and spectacle. Jesus rejects Satan's temptation to perform miracles for public acclaim (Matt 4:5–7), reminding us that the kingdom does not advance through performance. Paul insists that his preaching was "not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and power" (1 Cor 2:4).[69] The gospel's

[67] Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 193–95.
[68] Eugene H. Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 198–201.
[69] 1 Corinthians 2:4 (NRSV).

credibility comes not from rhetorical flourish or institutional power but from fidelity to the crucified Christ.

The prophetic tradition likewise resists commodification. Amos denounces those who "buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals" (Amos 8:6), warning that religious practice devoid of justice is itself consumerist idolatry.[70] Small churches, embedded in local contexts, are well positioned to embody this prophetic resistance by prioritizing faithfulness over consumer success.

Theologians across traditions have underscored the importance of counter-cultural resistance. Stanley Hauerwas argues that the church is called not to make Christianity credible by cultural standards but to embody a distinct way of life that challenges the world's assumptions.[71] Similarly, John Howard Yoder emphasizes that the church's political significance lies in its refusal to conform to dominant structures of power, choosing instead to witness through alternative practices of community.[72] Small churches, in their weakness and marginality, can model such resistance more easily than large, market-driven institutions.

Karl Barth, in his reflections on the church's witness, warns against confusing ecclesial vitality with cultural success.[73] The church's task is not to gain market share but to proclaim Christ. In this

[70] Amos 8:6 (NRSV).
[71] Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 99–102.
[72] John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 39–41.
[73] Karl Barth, *Community, State, and Church: Three Essays* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1968), 150–52.

light, the very lack of consumer appeal in small churches becomes an apologetic strength: it testifies that faith is not a commodity but a way of life rooted in God's action.

Sociologists confirm that authenticity is increasingly valued in an age of marketing saturation.[74] Small churches, precisely because of their simplicity, are often perceived as more authentic than large institutions that rely heavily on branding. Their apologetic power comes from embodying practices that cannot be bought or sold trust, presence, hospitality.

Yet sociological critiques also reveal the ambiguity of resistance. Some small congregations resist cultural trends not out of theological conviction but because of limited resources.[75] What appears counter-cultural may in fact be circumstantial. Furthermore, resistance can slip into reactionary postures: instead of prophetically critiquing consumerism, churches may reject all forms of innovation, mistaking stagnation for faithfulness.[76] The apologetic power of resistance, therefore, requires intentional cultivation; without it, small churches risk being dismissed as irrelevant.

The history of Christian communities offers examples of counter-cultural resistance as apologetic. The early monastic movements resisted the wealth and power of the Constantinian church by embracing simplicity, poverty, and prayer.[77] Their small communities embodied an alternative witness that testified to the sufficiency of Christ apart from imperial power.

---

[74] Mark Chaves, *Congregations in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 212–15.
[75] Karl Vaters, *Small Church Essentials: Field-Tested Principles for Leading a Healthy Congregation of Under 250* (Chicago: Moody, 2018), 87–90.
[76] Nancy T. Ammerman, *Congregation and Community* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 145–47.
[77] Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200–1000* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 211–13.

Similarly, the Anabaptists of the 16th century resisted both Catholic and Protestant establishments, rejecting coercion and state control. Their counter-cultural stance cost them persecution but also served as a compelling apologetic: they lived as if Jesus' Sermon on the Mount were literally true.[78][78]

In more recent history, the Black church tradition in America resisted consumerist and oppressive cultural narratives by cultivating spaces of hope and dignity.[79] Their worship, music, and communal care embodied a counter-sign to the commodification and dehumanization of Black bodies. The apologetic of resistance was not abstract but incarnated in song, service, and survival.

Yet resistance is not without risks. Critics argue that small churches can romanticize their simplicity while ignoring the need for adaptation.[80] Some congregations pride themselves on "not being like big churches," but this posture can mask fear, laziness, or lack of vision. In such cases, resistance is not prophetic but defensive. The apologetic collapses when difference is rooted in inability rather than intentionality.

Resistance can devolve into sectarianism. Groups that define themselves primarily by opposition to culture risk cutting themselves off from mission.[81] The small church's credibility depends not only on what it resists but also on what it embodies. Resistance must be paired with constructive practices of hospitality, justice, and proclamation.

---

[78] Harold S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1944), 25–27.
[79] James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 92–95.
[80] R. Stephen Warner, "The Place of the Congregation in the American Religious Configuration," in *American Congregations: New Perspectives in the Study of Congregations*, vol. 2, ed. James P. Wind and James W. Lewis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 55–56.
[81] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 189–91.

In today's cultural context, the apologetic of resistance has particular relevance. Consumerism pervades nearly every sphere of life, from education to politics to relationships. Churches that resist commodification embody an alternative plausibility structure: they show that life need not be reduced to consumption.[82] Small churches, by rejecting the performance-driven models of megachurches, can testify that faithfulness is measured by presence, not production.

At the same time, resistance must be intentional. It requires theological framing that interprets smallness not as failure but as fidelity. Practices of hospitality, simplicity, and justice must be cultivated to ensure that resistance is prophetic rather than accidental.[83] Only then does the small church's difference function as apologetic rather than irrelevance.

Toward Prophetic Resistance

The apologetic of counter-cultural resistance ultimately depends on whether small churches embrace their marginality as vocation. Weakness and simplicity must be framed not as limitations to be overcome but as theological commitments. The prophetic tradition reminds us that credibility lies in faithfulness, not spectacle.

Practically, this means rejecting consumerist metrics of success and instead cultivating practices of prayer, service, and solidarity with the marginalized. It means resisting the temptation to imitate

[82] Vincent J. Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 92–95.
[83] Christine D. Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 119–22.

cultural models of celebrity and branding, choosing instead to embody authenticity. It means seeing smallness not as an obstacle but as an opportunity to display the sufficiency of Christ.

When resistance is framed in this way, the small church becomes a living apologetic: not because it has the resources of culture, but because it refuses to bow to them. In its simplicity, it testifies that the gospel is not for sale.

Incarnational Logic

Small churches mirror the incarnational nature of God's mission. Just as "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14), so small congregations dwell within neighborhoods and relational networks in ways that large institutions often cannot.[84] Their presence is not abstract or distant but embodied in the lives of pastors and members who share the same schools, workplaces, and community spaces as their neighbors.[85] This embeddedness enables a kind of incarnational apologetic: the gospel is not simply proclaimed from a platform but lived in proximity, making the truth of the faith tangible in everyday relationships.[86]

[84] John 1:14 (NRSV).
[85] Christine D. Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 32–35.
[86] Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 45–47.

The Biblical Basis of Incarnational Presence

The incarnation is central to Christian theology: God does not remain distant but takes on flesh, entering the ordinary life of human communities. John's Gospel insists on this radical nearness Jesus did not hover above human experience but "pitched his tent" among us.[87] The apostle Paul echoes this incarnational dynamic when he describes becoming "all things to all people" that he might save some (1 Cor 9:22).[88] The credibility of the gospel is tied to its embodiment in particular contexts, not its abstraction into universal slogans.

Small churches are particularly adept at reflecting this incarnational dynamic. Their scale allows pastors to be not only preachers but neighbors, participants in local life who share the rhythms and struggles of the community. Their ministries are contextual not because of strategy documents but because they emerge from proximity.[89] In this sense, the apologetic of small churches parallels the incarnation itself: God's truth is made credible by being embodied within the fabric of ordinary life.

Theological Perspectives on Incarnation

Theologians have underscored the importance of the incarnation as a model for mission. Lesslie Newbigin insists that the gospel must be "made plausible" within particular cultural contexts, not

[87] John 1:14; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII*, Anchor Bible Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 14–15.
[88] 1 Corinthians 9:22 (NRSV).
[89] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 420–22.

through abstract argument but through embodied community.[90] David Bosch, in *Transforming Mission*, frames incarnation as the heart of missional theology: the church must take on the form of the culture it inhabits without being conformed to it.[91] Small churches, embedded in neighborhoods, are uniquely positioned for this task. Their credibility arises from presence, not production.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's reflections in *Life Together* also resonate here. He warns against "wish-dreams" of the church and instead calls Christians to embrace the concrete, messy, embodied community God gives.[92] Incarnational apologetics is not glamorous; it is lived in ordinary acts of service, forgiveness, and presence. Small congregations, precisely because they lack spectacle, often embody this reality more faithfully than larger institutions.

Sociological Insights

From a sociological perspective, small churches embody what Robert Wuthnow calls "communities of memory," places where faith is lived in continuity with shared histories and daily relationships.[93] Their embeddedness in local networks gives them credibility: they are not abstract institutions but tangible presences in neighborhoods.

[90] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 141–42.
[91] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 497–99.
[92] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtness (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 24–27.
[93] Robert Wuthnow, *Communities of Discourse: Ideology and Social Structure in the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and European Socialism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 69–70.

Nancy Ammerman's research shows that small congregations often provide disproportionate levels of social support relative to their size.[94] Members share resources, provide childcare, deliver meals, and embody community in ways that testify to the gospel's truth through action. This incarnational apologetic is persuasive precisely because it is lived, not performed.

Yet sociologists also caution that such embeddedness can slide into parochialism. Congregations that reflect only the culture of their immediate social group may lose their capacity to embody the universal scope of the gospel.[95] The apologetic power of incarnation is therefore double-edged: it can display the nearness of God, but it can also distort the gospel if not critically framed.

Vulnerabilities of Incarnational Apologetics

The incarnational strength of small churches can also become a vulnerability. Close relational ties may limit their reach, making them overly dependent on particular leaders or networks.[96] In some contexts, small churches mirror the demographics, politics, or biases of their neighborhood more than the gospel itself.[97] Localism, while a strength, risks degenerating into insularity.

when incarnational presence depends too heavily on pastoral leadership, congregations may struggle when leadership changes.[98] If the apologetic credibility rests in one figure rather than in

[94] Nancy T. Ammerman, *Congregation and Community* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 121–23.
[95] Mark Chaves, *Congregations in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 218–20.
[96] Andrew Root, *The Congregation in a Secular Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 152–55.
[97] R. Stephen Warner, "The Place of the Congregation in the American Religious Configuration," in *American Congregations: New Perspectives in the Study of Congregations*, vol. 2, ed. James P. Wind and James W. Lewis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 58–60.
[98] Karl Vaters, *Small Church Essentials: Field-Tested Principles for Leading a Healthy Congregation of Under 250* (Chicago: Moody, 2018), 97–100.

the whole community, the witness becomes fragile. Incarnational apologetics must therefore be shared, not concentrated.

Historical Illustrations

The early church offers clear illustrations of incarnational apologetics. House churches in the Roman Empire were not detached institutions but gatherings within households, embedded in neighborhoods.[99] Their credibility was precisely that they lived the gospel where people worked, ate, and shared life. The witness was incarnational: Christianity spread not primarily through public preaching but through networks of relationships.[100]

The monastic tradition also provides a historical model. Monks and nuns embedded themselves in particular places, often rural or marginal, and through their daily rhythms of prayer and labor bore witness to the presence of God.[101] Their incarnational witness shaped culture precisely through rootedness.

In more recent history, the Black church in America embodied incarnational apologetics by living alongside and within oppressed communities.[102] Pastors and members were not distant leaders but neighbors, sharing the struggles of segregation and poverty. Their apologetic was incarnational: faith was made credible by being lived in solidarity.

---

[99] Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 74–77.
[100] Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 95–97.
[101] Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 212–14.
[102] James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1972), 88–90.

Contemporary Applications

In a globalized and digital world, incarnational apologetics is perhaps more urgent than ever. Churches that exist primarily as online platforms risk losing credibility because they lack tangible presence.[103] Small congregations counter this trend by being visibly located in neighborhoods. They are not just websites or livestreams but communities that can be found, touched, and experienced.

This presence also has missional implications. Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost argue that mission must be "incarnational rather than attractional," moving into neighborhoods rather than expecting people to come to centralized buildings.[104] Small churches embody this by necessity: their scale often prevents attractional models, but this limitation becomes strength when reframed as incarnational witness.

Guarding Against Parochialism

For incarnational apologetics to be credible, small churches must guard against collapsing the universal mission of God into the particularities of their own social group.[105] Incarnation is not assimilation. Just as Christ entered a particular culture yet remained Lord of all, so churches must

---

[103] Heidi A. Campbell and Stephen Garner, *Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith in Digital Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 81–83.
[104] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 43–45.
[105] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 221–23.

embody faith in their context without being captured by it.[106] This requires practices of hospitality that welcome the stranger, disciplines of self-examination that resist cultural captivity, and theological teaching that frames local presence within the universal scope of God's kingdom.[107]

Toward a Faithful Incarnational Apologetic

The apologetic of incarnation is both powerful and precarious. It testifies to the radical nearness of God but risks distortion if not critically embraced. For small churches, the task is to live as embodied communities whose presence points beyond themselves to Christ. This means cultivating rootedness without parochialism, intimacy without insularity, and contextual faithfulness without cultural captivity.

When lived faithfully, the incarnational apologetic of small churches may be their most persuasive witness. In an age of abstraction and disembodiment, they testify that the gospel is flesh-and-blood reality, lived in neighborhoods, friendships, and communities. Their smallness is not weakness but vocation: to embody the presence of Christ in ways that can be seen, touched, and experienced.

Cultural Credibility

Sociological research consistently notes that individuals are more likely to trust smaller, relational communities than large, impersonal organizations.[108] In this sense, the small church's credibility

[106] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 510–12.
[107] Christine D. Pohl, *Living into Community*, 88–92.
[108] Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 22–24.

itself serves as an apologetic, defending the faith through lived authenticity rather than rhetorical argument alone. The personal relationships cultivated in these settings create the social capital necessary for witness, as trust is increasingly scarce in a world marked by institutional suspicion.[109] The church's apologetic, then, is not primarily argumentative but experiential: neighbors see the gospel enacted in the practices of care, presence, and mutual responsibility.[110]

Trust as a Scarce Resource

Contemporary societies are characterized by what many scholars call an "epidemic of distrust." Political institutions, media outlets, and even large corporations have suffered declining credibility over the last several decades.[111] Robert Putnam's research demonstrates the erosion of "social capital" the networks of trust and reciprocity that once bound communities together.[112] In such a climate, smaller, more relational groups often retain credibility precisely because they embody the intimacy and accountability lacking in larger institutions.

Small churches stand out in this environment as enclaves of trust. Members know one another by name, share life events, and often extend care that blurs the boundaries between private and public life.[113] This trust is not abstract but embodied: it is seen when meals are delivered to sick members, when job leads are shared among congregants, or when a funeral brings together an entire

[109] Nancy T. Ammerman, *Congregation and Community* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 93–95.
[110] Christine D. Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 18–20.
[111] Pew Research Center, *Public Trust in Government: 1958–2022* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2022), 3–5.
[112] Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 65–70.
[113] Mark Chaves, *Congregations in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 163–66.

neighborhood. Such practices make the faith believable not because of logical arguments but because of lived authenticity.

The Biblical Witness to Credibility

The biblical narrative underscores the importance of credibility through lived practice. Jesus warns against hypocrisy, noting that a tree is known by its fruit (Matt 7:16–20).[114] The apostolic letters repeatedly emphasize that the church's witness depends on its moral and relational integrity: elders must be "above reproach" (1 Tim 3:2), and communities are called to "adorn the doctrine of God" by their conduct (Titus 2:10).[115]

In the early church, credibility often came not through public debate but through communal witness. Tertullian famously records the observation of outsiders: "See how they love one another."[116] The apologetic was cultural rather than rhetorical, rooted in observable practices of care. Small churches, in their relational density, have the opportunity to embody this biblical call with particular force.

[114] Matthew 7:16–20 (NRSV).
[115] 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 2:10 (NRSV).
[116] Tertullian, *Apology*, trans. T. R. Glover, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931), 39.

Theological Perspectives on Credibility

Theologians such as Lesslie Newbigin have stressed that the plausibility of the gospel depends on the existence of communities that embody it.[117] Rational proofs, while valuable, are insufficient in cultures where trust in institutions has collapsed. The church must therefore function as a plausibility structure, demonstrating in its communal life that the gospel is not only true but also livable.

Stanley Hauerwas likewise argues that the church's witness lies in the integrity of its practices rather than in intellectual arguments.[118] Credibility arises when Christians live differently when forgiveness, reconciliation, and care are embodied in ways that cannot be explained apart from the gospel. The small church, with its emphasis on intimacy and accountability, provides a fertile ground for such practices.

Sociological Strengths of Small Communities

Sociologists consistently affirm that trust is more easily cultivated in smaller, relationally dense groups.[119] Mark Chaves notes that small congregations often excel in fostering face-to-face relationships, which generate higher levels of trust and reciprocity.[120] Nancy Ammerman's ethnographies confirm that small churches often serve as hubs of social capital, providing relational glue in communities where other institutions have weakened.[121]

---

[117] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 227.
[118] Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 111–12.
[119] Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 85–88.
[120] Chaves, *Congregations in America*, 165–66.
[121] Nancy T. Ammerman, *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 47–49.

These insights align with Putnam's distinction between "bonding" and "bridging" social capital. Bonding capital refers to trust within a group, while bridging capital refers to trust extended beyond the group to outsiders.[122] Small churches excel in bonding capital, creating deep relational ties among members. This is apologetically powerful because it demonstrates a way of life marked by love, accountability, and care.

Fragility of Credibility

At the same time, cultural credibility is fragile. Trust in smaller communities can erode quickly when conflict, hypocrisy, or abuse surfaces.[123] Because the small church is relationally dense, failures are felt more intensely and can damage its credibility in disproportionate ways. A single scandal can undermine not just the reputation of a congregation but the plausibility of the gospel it proclaims.[124]

Sociologists note that while trust in small groups is strong, it does not always translate into broad cultural influence.[125] Small churches may be deeply trusted by their own members yet remain invisible to the wider community. Their apologetic force, then, risks being insular: persuasive to insiders but irrelevant to outsiders who never encounter it.

---

[122] Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 22–23.
[123] Andrew Root, *The Congregation in a Secular Age: Keeping Sacred Time Against the Speed of Modern Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 152–55.
[124] Scot McKnight and Laura Barringer, *A Church Called Tov: Forming a Goodness Culture That Resists Abuses of Power and Promotes Healing* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2020), 19–22.
[125] R. Stephen Warner, "The Place of the Congregation in the American Religious Configuration," in *American Congregations: New Perspectives in the Study of Congregations*, vol. 2, ed. James P. Wind and James W. Lewis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 54–56.

Historical Illustrations

The early church illustrates both the strength and fragility of credibility. House churches won credibility through their care for the poor, their practice of hospitality, and their willingness to suffer persecution.[126] Yet they also faced critiques of hypocrisy, sectarianism, and immorality. The credibility of the faith hinged on the integrity of their communal life.

The Black church in America provides another example. In contexts of systemic injustice, small congregations embodied credibility through resilience, music, and care for their communities.[127] Their witness was powerful not because of institutional clout but because of lived authenticity. At the same time, their credibility was sometimes dismissed by outsiders who equated smallness with irrelevance or backwardness.[128]

Contemporary Relevance

In the contemporary West, where skepticism toward institutions is high, small churches may be uniquely poised to embody credibility. Surveys indicate that people are more likely to trust local networks than national institutions.[129] A small church that practices hospitality, serves its neighbors, and lives transparently can therefore offer a compelling apologetic. Its credibility is experiential: outsiders may not be persuaded by arguments, but they are moved by meals shared, debts forgiven, and friendships offered.

---

[126] Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 89–91.
[127] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 29–32.
[128] James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 105–07.
[129] Pew Research Center, *Trust and Distrust in America* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2019), 6–9.

Yet this credibility must be carefully stewarded. In an age of public scandals and widespread distrust, even minor failures can have major repercussions.[130] Small churches must cultivate accountability, transparency, and humility if they are to sustain credibility. Without these practices, their apologetic collapses.

Toward a Theology of Credibility

The apologetic of cultural credibility ultimately rests on theological commitments. Trustworthiness is not an optional byproduct but a gospel mandate. Jesus describes his disciples as "the light of the world," whose good works give credibility to their message (Matt 5:14–16).[131] Paul urges the Thessalonians to "aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands… so that you may command the respect of outsiders" (1 Thess 4:11–12).[132]

For small churches, this means that their apologetic task is less about crafting persuasive arguments and more about embodying trustworthy practices. Hospitality, integrity, reconciliation, and service become not only ethical obligations but apologetic strategies. Credibility is missional: it is how the gospel is defended in a skeptical age.

[130] McKnight and Barringer, *A Church Called Tov*, 35–39.
[131] Matthew 5:14–16 (NRSV).
[132] 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12 (NRSV).

Implications for Apologetics and Mission

The apologetic task in a post-Christian age requires more than intellectual argument; it requires embodied plausibility.[133] Small churches offer a corrective to the metrics of "success" by emphasizing faithfulness, presence, and witness. For leaders, this means cultivating practices of hospitality, service, and discipleship that highlight the church as a community of embodied defense.[134]

Apologetics, then, is reframed: it is not primarily about debating skeptics but about forming communities whose very existence makes the gospel believable.[135] The small church is uniquely equipped for this role, precisely because its scale enables authenticity and relational depth.

Reframing Apologetics

Historically, apologetics has often been framed in terms of rational defense arguments for God's existence, evidences for the resurrection, or philosophical engagement with skepticism.[136] While these approaches remain valuable, they are increasingly insufficient in cultures marked by distrust of institutions, fragmentation of authority, and suspicion of rational "proofs."[137] In such contexts, credibility is experiential: people are less persuaded by syllogisms than by communities that embody hope, love, and justice.

---

[133] Alister McGrath, *Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seekers and Skeptics Find Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 19–21.
[134] Christine D. Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 117–20.
[135] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 227–28.
[136] Avery Dulles, *A History of Apologetics* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 28–30.
[137] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 423–25.

The small church, by its very nature, is poised to embody this apologetic reframing. Its plausibility lies not in argument alone but in lived authenticity. When neighbors see care extended, forgiveness practiced, and diversity embraced, the gospel is defended not in theory but in life.[138] The apologetic force of the small church is therefore not ancillary but central to the task of mission in a secular age.

Faithfulness Over Metrics

One of the most significant implications of this study is a redefinition of "success." Contemporary ecclesial culture often measures vitality in terms of attendance, budgets, and visibility.[139] These metrics, while not unimportant, do not capture the theological essence of the church. Small churches embody an alternative imagination: success is measured by faithfulness, not scale.

This reframing echoes Paul's exhortation that "it is required of stewards that they be found faithful" (1 Cor 4:2).[140] The apologetic strength of the small church lies in precisely this reorientation. Its task is not to compete with cultural institutions for size or influence but to remain faithful to Christ in its context. Faithfulness itself becomes credibility: in a world of overextension and ambition, the small church testifies to the sufficiency of presence and witness.

[138] Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 12–15.
[139] Karl Vaters, *Small Church Essentials: Field-Tested Principles for Leading a Healthy Congregation of Under 250* (Chicago: Moody, 2018), 55–57.
[140] 1 Corinthians 4:2 (NRSV).

Hospitality as Apologetic

Hospitality emerges as one of the central practices through which small churches embody apologetics. Christine Pohl describes hospitality not simply as social etiquette but as a theological practice rooted in God's welcome of the stranger.[141] Small congregations, with their relational density, are uniquely suited to embody this practice. Meals shared, doors opened, and lives welcomed become apologetic acts: they make the gospel visible.

This has significant missional implications. In a culture marked by isolation and loneliness, small churches that intentionally cultivate hospitality offer a powerful witness.[142] Hospitality resists consumerism by affirming that people are not commodities but persons made in God's image. It resists suspicion by extending trust. It resists individualism by embodying community. In this sense, hospitality becomes an apologetic not only for the church but for the plausibility of the gospel itself.

Service and Justice

Alongside hospitality, practices of service and justice strengthen the apologetic of the small church. Small congregations often engage in acts of care—food pantries, tutoring, neighborhood clean-ups—that, while modest in scale, are disproportionate in impact.[143] These practices demonstrate that the gospel is not merely proclaimed but enacted.

---

[141] Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 34–37.
[142] Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 471–73.
[143] Nancy T. Ammerman, *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 66–68.

Theologically, this aligns with James's insistence that faith without works is dead (James 2:17).[144] Apologetics, then, is not only about intellectual defense but about works of mercy and justice that render the gospel credible. The small church, because of its embeddedness in local communities, is often able to discern and respond to concrete needs more quickly than larger institutions.[145][145]

Discipleship and Formation

The small church's apologetic also depends on its ability to form disciples who embody the gospel in daily life. Formation is not simply cognitive but relational: it occurs in mentoring, shared practices, and accountability.[146] Small congregations, with their relational depth, are especially suited to this kind of formation.

Lesslie Newbigin emphasizes that the church's mission is not merely to proclaim the gospel but to form communities in which the gospel is lived.[147] Small churches that prioritize discipleship embody this vision. Their apologetic strength lies not in argument alone but in the transformed lives of members who reflect Christ in their neighborhoods, workplaces, and families.

[144] James 2:17 (NRSV).
[145] Mark Chaves, *Congregations in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 211–14.
[146] Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 55–57.
[147] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 153–55.

Challenges to the Apologetic

At the same time, this study has highlighted the fragility of the small church's apologetic. Its credibility depends on integrity; when hypocrisy, conflict, or abuse arises, trust is undermined disproportionately.[148] Moreover, the apologetic can collapse into insularity if communities fail to extend hospitality beyond their members.[149]

Missiologically, this requires intentional safeguards. Small churches must cultivate transparency, accountability, and practices of reconciliation to sustain credibility.[150] They must resist the temptation to romanticize smallness, recognizing that their apologetic force is not automatic but contingent upon faithfulness.

Missional Imagination

The implications extend beyond defense to mission. Small churches are not only credible communities but also missional ones. Their apologetic strength positions them for creative forms of outreach that large institutions may overlook: neighborhood partnerships, interfaith dialogue, local justice initiatives.[151] Their credibility gives them relational capital that can be leveraged missionally.

---

[148] Scot McKnight and Laura Barringer, *A Church Called Tov: Forming a Goodness Culture That Resists Abuses of Power and Promotes Healing* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2020), 39–41.
[149] R. Stephen Warner, "The Place of the Congregation in the American Religious Configuration," in *American Congregations: New Perspectives in the Study of Congregations*, vol. 2, ed. James P. Wind and James W. Lewis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 61–63.
[150] Andrew Root, *The Congregation in a Secular Age: Keeping Sacred Time Against the Speed of Modern Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 152–55.
[151] Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 122–25.

Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost argue for a shift from "attractional" to "incarnational" models of mission.[152] Small churches, by necessity, embody this shift. They cannot rely on spectacle to draw people in; instead, they move outward, embedding themselves in the life of their neighborhoods. This missional posture is itself apologetic: it testifies that the gospel is lived among, not merely preached to.

Toward a Post-Christendom Apologetic

The decline of Christendom requires a rethinking of apologetics. In contexts where cultural privilege is waning, credibility depends less on institutional authority and more on embodied plausibility.[153] Small churches, often marginalized themselves, are well positioned for this shift. Their apologetic is not dependent on cultural power but on faithfulness in weakness.

This reframing aligns with Charles Taylor's analysis in *A Secular Age*.[154] Taylor notes that belief in late modernity is no longer "the default." In such a context, apologetics cannot rest on assumed authority but must engage plausibility structures. Small churches, by embodying trust, authenticity, and presence, create micro-communities where the gospel remains believable.

[152] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 40–43.
[153] Graham Tomlin, *The Provocative Church* (London: SPCK, 2002), 22–24.
[154] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 531–33.

The narrative that small churches are failures of ecclesial vitality must be challenged. In reality, small congregations embody a profound apologetic: they display the gospel's credibility through authentic community, counter-cultural resistance, and theological faithfulness. Far from being obstacles, small churches are indispensable witnesses in a skeptical world.

The church's apologetic task is not ultimately measured in scale but in faithfulness. The small church stands as a living argument that "God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong" (1 Cor 1:27).[155]In this light, small churches are not "less than" but are an apologetic in themselves. They testify that credibility rests not in cultural dominance but in embodied presence. They remind us that the gospel is not defended primarily by argument but by communities that live its truth.

[155] 1 Corinthians 1:27 (NRSV).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ammerman, Nancy T. Congregation and Community. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997.

Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Athanasius. On the Incarnation. Translated by John Behr. Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011.

Augustine. The City of God. Translated by Henry Bettenson. London: Penguin, 1984.

Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament. In Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 6. Edited by Philip Schaff. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994.

Barnett, Paul. The Second Epistle to the Corinthians. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.

Barth, Karl. Church Dogmatics IV/1: The Doctrine of Reconciliation. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956.

Community, State, and Church: Three Essays. Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1968.

Bender, Harold S. The Anabaptist Vision. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1944.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. Letters and Papers from Prison. Edited by Eberhard Bethge. New York: Touchstone, 1997.

Life Together. Translated by Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtness. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.

Bosch, David J. Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991.

Brown, Peter. The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.

The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200–1000. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.

Brown, Raymond E. The Gospel According to John I–XII. Anchor Bible Commentary. New York: Doubleday, 1966.

Brueggemann, Walter. Cadences of Home: Preaching Among Exiles. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997.

Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986.

Campbell, Heidi A., and Stephen Garner. Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith in Digital Culture. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016.

Chaves, Mark. Congregations in America. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Chrysostom, John. Homilies on First Corinthians. In Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 12. Edited by Philip Schaff. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994.

Cone, James H. The Cross and the Lynching Tree. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011.

The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1972.

Dulles, Avery. A History of Apologetics. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005.

Dunn, James D. G. Jesus Remembered. Christianity in the Making, Vol. 1. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

Frost, Michael, and Alan Hirsch. The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013.

Hauerwas, Stanley. The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983.

Hauerwas, Stanley, and William H. Willimon. Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989.

Leonard, Bill J. God's Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990.

Lincoln, C. Eric, and Lawrence H. Mamiya. The Black Church in the African American Experience. Durham: Duke University Press, 1990.

Luther, Martin. Heidelberg Disputation (1518).

McGrath, Alister. Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seekers and Skeptics Find Faith. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012.

McKnight, Scot, and Laura Barringer. A Church Called Tov: Forming a Goodness Culture That Resists Abuses of Power and Promotes Healing. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2020.

Meeks, Wayne A. The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983.

Miller, Vincent J. Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture. New York: Continuum, 2005.

Newbigin, Lesslie. The Gospel in a Pluralist Society. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989.

The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.

Pew Research Center. Public Trust in Government: 1958–2022. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2022.

Trust and Distrust in America. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2019.

Peterson, Eugene H. The Pastor: A Memoir. New York: HarperOne, 2011.

Pohl, Christine D. Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.

Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

Putnam, Robert D. Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

Putnam, Robert D., and David E. Campbell. American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010.

Root, Andrew. The Congregation in a Secular Age: Keeping Sacred Time Against the Speed of Modern Life. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021.

Roxburgh, Alan J. Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011.

Roxburgh, Alan J., and M. Scott Boren. Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009.

Roxburgh, Alan J., and Fred Romanuk. The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006.

Sargeant, Kimon Howland. Seeker Churches: Promoting Traditional Religion in a Nontraditional Way. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000.

Stark, Rodney. The Rise of Christianity. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996.

Stark, Rodney, and Roger Finke. Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

Taylor, Charles. A Secular Age. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.

Terullian. Apology. Translated by T. R. Glover. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931.

Thumma, Scott, and Dave Travis. Beyond Megachurch Myths: What We Can Learn from America's Largest Churches. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007.

Tomlin, Graham. The Provocative Church. London: SPCK, 2002.

Vaters, Karl. The Grasshopper Myth: Big Churches, Small Churches and the Small Thinking That Divides Us. Newport Beach, CA: New Small Church, 2013.

Small Church Essentials: Field-Tested Principles for Leading a Healthy Congregation of Under 250. Chicago: Moody, 2018.

Volf, Miroslav. Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996.

Warner, R. Stephen. “The Place of the Congregation in the American Religious Configuration.” In American Congregations: New Perspectives in the Study of Congregations, Vol. 2, edited by James P. Wind and James W. Lewis, 54–63. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Willard, Dallas. The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’ Essential Teachings on Discipleship. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006.

Wuthnow, Robert. Communities of Discourse: Ideology and Social Structure in the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and European Socialism. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Yoder, John Howard. The Politics of Jesus. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.