

Further Thoughts on Christian Resistance

These reflections follow Alan Roxburgh's initial article: '[Why not a Christian counter movement to neoliberalism?](#)' and Sally Mann's Rapid Response (*Journal of Missional Practice*, Issue 11, Winter 2019)

In a [recent article](#) I raised the question: 'Why not a Christian counter movement to neoliberalism?'. Some responded with appropriate push back describing how they are part of such a counter movement within their church communities. As Sally Mann so aptly points out in her Rapid Response, Christians cannot-

...sustain long term transformation of their community without the practices of a communal faith that keeps re-centring them... among its ranks, paradoxically, are communities providing exactly this counter-culture subversive message, providing prototypes of a different way of being a society in the West.

Such responses are justified. I needed to have been clearer in recognizing that there are, indeed, all kinds of stirrings across specific communities of God's people. I also recognize that in the vast majority of these instances those Christians involved are drawn from people who have been terribly deprived by the economics of neoliberalism along with emerging generations who know that the social, economic and political world that is neoliberalism cannot sustain thriving communities. I hear the push back and am thankful that there is this witness to how the Spirit is fermenting something very different on the ground and among those who, by the standards of neoliberalism, are powerless or of no value.

That being said, I would still return to my question of why there is no Christian counter movement to neoliberalism? I suppose I ask this question as I work with and engage with so many variations of the Euro-tribal churches across North America. These are largely middle-class congregations across the continent. They have been the focus of my work for more than forty years. It was to these groups that I was addressing the question and, perhaps, that contributes to my not engaging these other grounded experiences of the church.

The question of 'why?' is still an important one because, in their own anxious planning and attempts to make themselves relevant, these churches are out of touch with the movements of the Spirit fermenting under the radar of most church life. Because of this, they fail to see or to see any relevance in, the kinds of movements that are represented in the people who reacted to my article. Movements do begin usually among those who feel increasingly alienated from the mainstream of political and economic life. This is amply evident just now in the French 'Yellow jacket' protests across France.^[1] But why is it that across the broad consensus of churches in North America there is hardly a ripple of concern about neoliberalism beyond supporting shelters of helping the needy?

In his recent book, *Neoliberalism's Demons: On the Political Theology of Late Capital*^[2] Adam Kotsko presents a fascinating 'political theology' of neoliberalism, which means he takes seriously that neoliberalism is much more than just an economic theory or means of carrying out

economic policy. It is definitely these things, but, writes Kotsko

...neoliberalism is more than simply a formula for economic policy. It aspires to be a complete way of life and a holistic worldview, in a way that previous models of capitalism did not. It is this combination of policy agenda and moral ethos...designate neoliberalism as a form of political theology...it is a discourse that aims to reshape the world.[3]

As such, neoliberalism is a theology, a whole way of life and meaning that justifies itself, hence it needs no defense because it's 'just the way things are'. It's like the believer saying 'God exists'. As such neoliberalism continually reproduces itself in all the assumed conversation among people, in news reports, in marketing, in the branding of life. As a theology it has its own legitimacy, its own promises of salvation and the future, rooted in a profoundly individualistic understanding of the person.[4]

Kotsko goes on to observe what I experienced on my back deck when I wrote that initial article – middle class, affluent church members totally bemused by the nature of neoliberalism and, in conversation, communicating that this is 'just how things are' and there is no other way. For Kotsko, 'Neoliberalism loves to hide'.^[5] This is seen in the questions my friends were asking; they have little to no acquaintance with the forces that now shape our political, economic and social life. They just assume this is the way the world is and nothing can be done about it. They depend on their churches to support and augment their moral codes *within* the neoliberal world and that God might, somehow, get us through all the turmoil, the anxiety and the fear. A countermovement to neoliberalism? Overall, inconceivable! Why would you create a countermovement to the way things just are? Politics and economics are just background realities. They don't shape the moral lives we nurture in our churches as we practice our own forms of neoliberal life in terms of individual salvation and personal spirituality.

Perhaps all of this is part of the 'why'. I suspect these reflections are a plea for a 'how' that comes from grasping that the gospel is a far bigger story than this.

This conversation is continued in a video discussion between Sally Mann (who lives in East London) and myself (living in Vancouver, Canada). You are encouraged to listen in.

Go to

[1] See my observations on these protests in <http://alanroxburgh.com/2018/11/whats-driving-this-french-revolution/>

[2] Adam Kotsko, *Neoliberalism's Demons: On the Political Theology of Late Capital* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 2018).

[3] Kotsko, 8-9.

[4] Once one understands this theology and its pervasiveness across Western societies it's not hard to understand why people feel so lonely or why there is the increasing recognition that any

form of community or belonging is so hard to find. See the *New York Times* op ed on [this](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/23/opinion/loneliness-political-polarization.html)
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/23/opinion/loneliness-political-polarization.html>

[5] Kotsko, 11