

IN A CHURCH
DISMANTLED

THE LIGHT STILL SHINES

*Reflections in
Sacred Time*



CONRAD L. KANAGY

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THE LIGHT STILL SHINES
Reflections in Sacred Time
by Conrad L. Kanagy

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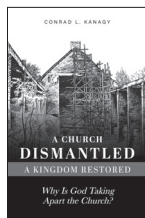
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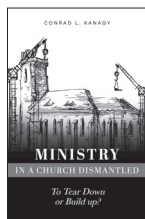
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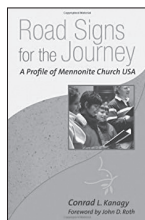


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TO BOB BAKER

You have walked with me
through darkness and light.

In the end by Grace,
we are both finding our way home.

**“The land be level and the water folded,
Trees gigantic and the walls built low.”**

—Reynolds Price, “All Will Be Whole” (after Rilke)

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FOREWORD

God is Light, and God expressed Light by speaking, “Let there be light.” There is much light unseen in darkness to the natural eye—radio waves or ultraviolet, for example. However, the full range of electromagnetic energy extends well beyond the spectrum of light visible to the human eye. This is true in everyday life on the planet and in the spiritual realm.

In this very darkness, we meet the One who is Light. Herein, we may explore intriguing questions as to how God feels and sees our world. “He knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with Him.” (Daniel 2:22b NASB) In this darkness, the scriptures are the lamp to our feet and, therefore, a light to our path.

Because we are willing to look at the dismantledness of the church, we see ways God continues to creatively say, “Let there be light.” That light exposes darkness for what it is, purports to be, but is not. In that illumination, we may consider our own motives and acknowledge where we have been, or are, in the dark.

Living in dismantledness is not for the faint of heart, but it is a setting for healthy questioning of what is, with a posture of reconstruction in mind. We gain additional perspective when we live with the day of our death in mind. While suffering, we find abundant hope in Christ, who suffered most severely all of the consequences of darkness.

Welcome to the community of Light Seekers who have engaged with Dr. Conrad Kanagy in podcasts and blogs. Sit with him

in the college classroom, congregation, and sociology lab. Join him in devotional meditation, reminiscence of childhood, and reflection upon significant life experiences.

In the chapters that follow, you will see that you are deeply loved and not alone.

- Keith E. Yoder, Ed.D.
Founder, Teaching the Word Ministries

INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This volume is the third in the series entitled “A Church Dismantled—A Kingdom Restored,” based on podcast episodes I wrote during the Covid-19 pandemic. These episodes, now chapters in the current book, were mainly written during Sacred Time of Advent, 2020, and Lent, 2021—usually in the midst of or immediately following my morning time with God and before I headed off to classes at Elizabethtown College. This is not a typical “devotional” book for either sacred season and might be just as beneficial to one’s soul and “life with God” if read during Ordinary Time. On the other hand, with many themes related to Advent and Lent in the book, it will be significant if read during Sacred Time.

This book follows two previous and just published volumes, addressing themes related to God’s dismantling of the church. This book does not so directly address the church’s dismantling as do the other two, but instead seeks to identify the light that still shines in a dismantled church, a church that seems so much in the shadows and in the dark these days. But to understand the fuller context, I need to describe what I mean by the dismantling of the church.

For me, dismantling the Church is about joining God’s grand excavation project of Isaiah 40 (which has captured my imagination ever since I was a child) by lowering mountains that are barriers to the shalom of God’s coming kingdom, by raising valleys in which the marginalized have had to hide for fear of being overrun by those who

hold the power strings, by making crooked paths straight and rough places a level plain along which the lost, the wounded, and the needy may find their way home.¹

A second component to the dismantling of the church is the Spirit's removal of those "mantles" of our own devising that we have placed on the Church and the Christian faith. These cover up the truths of God's kingdom that we are called to live by as our truths. The dismantling I identify is also personal and autobiographical, as I confess my own false mantles while also calling out the false mantles of the Church—whether those false mantles be imposed upon any one or all of us, or upon God, or upon the Church itself.

From early on as a child, I was caught in cycles of torment and depression characteristic of obsessive-compulsiveness, which were fed by the oppressiveness of an "Old Order" cultural fog that emphasized goodness, performance, perfection, and, on top of it all, God's wrath. So whenever I failed to hit the high mark, which was every moment of every day, I remember having these kinds of thoughts: *Am I the only sinner among this bunch of saints? Are all the others okay with their sins? Do they know some secret about how to survive with a guilty conscience, which no one has shared with me? I don't understand why everyone says the gospel is so wonderful when it often feels like hell instead of good news.*

Slowly and over time, I began to understand that what the Church had done (and all too often still does) was to "mantle" (as in "muzzle") the truth by declaring one thing while being altogether comfortable at times with something else. To "mantle" means to cover up and smooth over. The Church has too often covered up truths

¹ I will use lower-case church and upper-case Church interchangeably. While we can readily draw historical, theological and sociological distinctions between the two, such differentiation is beyond this book's intent. And such clear lines may only exist in our heads and textbooks.

and smoothed over falsehoods. It was recognizing the false mantles of the church for what they are that saved me from giving up on God. And I suspect that I will spend the rest of my days doing the work of dismantling if it means that even one more person could be set free, as I have been set free over this past year—set free by the One named Jesus who so dismantled the religious arrogance and towers of his day that it cost him his life to save the world.

In 2017, I was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease at the age of fifty-two. For the first year, I cried and raged as I grieved the losses to come. But over time, I have also begun to recognize the gifts that I am receiving due to this disease. One of those gifts is the clarity with which I now see the horizon ahead and the knowledge that my days of quality health are limited. This recognition has been transformative for me, as I realize that my own body is being dismantled at the same time that the Church itself is being dismantled. My weaknesses are being exposed; the mantles I wore to cover those weaknesses have been stripped away. I can’t hide my vulnerabilities or deny my fragility. Over the past four years, I have had a new conversion to Jesus and a new awareness of God’s incredible love for his children—meaning every human being is created with the imprint of God upon them. I have little doubt that the podcast or this book series would ever have emerged without this disease that took me by such surprise, but which I now realize is my own unique path home.

It has been clear to me during the past year that I am not alone in my sense that the Church is in the process of being dismantled. The podcast “A Church Dismantled—A Kingdom Restored” has appealed to many more listeners than I ever imagined it would. Nearly 50,000 episodes have been downloaded in more than eighty countries and almost 1,600 cities. It seems my writing has had a unique appeal to folks who have become disillusioned with the American Church and have perhaps left it. I call these folks “the diaspora”—

those who have left what we have long presumed to be the primary institution by which one discovers the kingdom of God but which too often is the one that leads folks in the wrong direction or in no direction at all.

I have many persons to acknowledge and thank for their support of this project over the past year and longer. I have walked with my wife Heidi for more than three decades through more darkness and light than with anyone else in the world. Some days it feels like we are both in the dark, and some days as if one of us is and the other is not. And then, on periodic days, it feels like we are both in the light together. Regardless, we have by the grace of God found our way through a more than two-year marriage separation, multiple bouts of cancer, numerous church crises, my Parkinson's diagnosis, and more. Through the darkness of these and other experiences, there has been enough of the light to keep us on the Way as promised to all saints.

Elizabethtown College for nearly three decades has given me space to engage in my church-related research and practice of ministry. Across four college administrations, I have been blessed by the same support and encouragement, without which I would not have been able to “pastor” as a minister and “profess” as a teacher at the same time. In keeping with what I have always experienced, the College has supported and promoted the podcast “A Church Dismantled—A Kingdom Restored” and has publicized my efforts widely. The College has also given me a sabbatical for the fall of 2021 to continue writing and publishing my work.

Keith Yoder of Teaching the Word Ministries has written the Foreword and has been a kind of “Gandalf” for Heidi and me in the past ten years of ministry. He has so often seen a different reality than we saw. Keith has spoken blessing time and again over us. He has built our confidence in ministry and in our gifts. He has seen

light where we could only see darkness. More than anyone else in the past ten years, Keith has attended to our shared ministry as a couple, believing in us when we were beyond believing in ourselves.

Our congregation at Elizabethtown Mennonite Church has graciously been a space for me over the last decade to hone my preaching and writing for an audience that lives and labors in the everyday world of work, home, and play.

Dan Mast of Masthof Press and his staff have been a valued collaborator on this project—I cannot imagine a more supportive publishing partner than Dan and his team. And I am so grateful for the careful proofreading of Linda Boll.

All of these essays were written during the Covid-19 pandemic. For the most part, I have sought to retain the present tense in which they were initially penned. This book and the podcast episodes that preceded it have represented the intersection and integration of various areas of my professional and personal life that had been disparate entities in the past. They have allowed me to draw upon nearly three decades of teaching sociology, thirty-five years of sociological research, fifteen years of church and denominational consulting, twenty years of ministry, my childhood and coming-of-age in a conservative Mennonite-Amish community, my life-long struggle with the terror of God's wrath exacerbated by Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, and the diagnosis, four years ago, of Parkinson's disease.

As you will read throughout the chapters of this book, the Parkinson's diagnosis has been a challenging but transformative experience for me. Uncannily, it has represented my own dismantling while I have been writing about the dismantling of the church. But as you will hear me say repeatedly, this disease has given me a timeline and horizon that I had not seen so clearly before. It has brought with it an encounter of the love of God, a re-conversion to Jesus, and an outpouring of his Spirit in ways I had never experienced previ-

ously in my life. And it has led to freedom, clarity of identity, and a sense of contentment like none I had known before. As I have often said, if it finally took Parkinson's disease to bring these gifts to me, then thanks be to God! For it may just be that these graces also ensure that I find my way finally "home." My prayer is that my reflections throughout this book and those yet to come in future volumes will be an encouragement to you and that they will cast a bit of light on your own journey toward the new heaven and new earth that are just beyond the horizon ahead of us.

So, accompanied by the gracious words of the apostle Paul, himself plagued by weakness and troubled with a thorn in the flesh that God would not remove, may you receive my words, like Paul's, as a means of encouragement. For amid the dismantling, "We do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal" (2 Cor 4:16-18).

*-Conrad L. Kanagy, Elizabethtown, PA
October 6, 2021*

READERS' RESOURCES:

The website www.achurchdismantled.com contains resources to support the material in this book, including a short video in which I address each of the sections of the book and study guides for personal or group reflection and discussion. Readers may subscribe at the website to receive weekly blog posts and “A Church Dismantled” series updates.

PART ONE

FINDING MY WAY
THROUGH THE DARK

CHAPTER 1

I've Already Found That Fountain— and Darkness Is Not Sin

March 16, 2021

For the last several weeks, as I've met with the Lord each morning, I've been listening to one of my favorite old hymns entitled "There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood."

There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins. And sinners plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains. The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day. And there may I, though vile as he, wash all my sins away. E'er since by faith, I saw the stream thy flowing wounds supply, redeeming love has been my theme and shall be till I die. When this poor lispings, stammering tongue lies silent in the grave, then in a nobler, sweeter song, I'll sing Thy power to save.²

A recent blog post about my life-long struggle with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and the accompanying torment over sin, shame, and guilt elicited this response from a reader:

Step number one is to turn towards Jesus, admitting that you are a sinner. In a scenario where a doctor has diagnosed your sin as a disorder, it seems to me that repentance would

² <https://www.hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/1006>.

be impossible. Thus your continued and distressing concerns of sin and guilt. Victory over your “disorder,” along with the associated guilt, is immediate and lasting through faith in the finished work of Christ. I highly recommend it.

This reader’s reaction gave me a chance to utter Jesus’ words on the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do [or say].” It also allows me to respond to a church that for far too long has assumed that those of us who struggle with mental illness of all kinds are weaker than others, do not have enough faith, are walking in some sort of sin, or are under the influence of some form of demonic power.

What the church for too long has failed to understand is that on some occasions, it is the church and its failures to articulate the Good News of Jesus that has been the same incubator within which depression, fear, anxiety, panic, and mental torment are nurtured and then discounted and minimized. Religious toxicity does not emerge in a vacuum. It is too often the church that has caused or at least contributed to the pain that some have lived within—the trauma out of which our disorders can grow.

Which I think is why I love this hymn so much by William Cowper from the mid-18th century. Cowper was a friend of John Newton, who of course penned “Amazing Grace,” and written by one who clearly knew of what he spoke. Cowper suffered all of his life from depression, experienced a panic attack as he interviewed for a prestigious job, and attempted to take his life three times because he thought God told him to do so. He would eventually die, at least in part, for reasons related to his life-long struggle.³

But in the midst of one of his depressive bouts, Cowper penned the beautiful words of this hymn: “There is a fountain filled

³ <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-there-is-a-fountain-filled-with-blood>.

with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins, and sinners plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains." Only one who was desperate for wholeness could write such words. They could not have been written by a publican or a Pharisee or even by some folks who show up for church these days. They are written by one who knows they are broken, who knows they are crooked, who knows they are desperate, and who knows just how sick they are. And these words were written precisely by one of those for whom our Savior came and for whom he comes still.

In John 9, Jesus heals a blind man. Those who stood by watching assumed that either the man or his parents had sinned. Jesus cut short their self-righteous blame game and said, "There *ain't* nobody sinned!" Instead, "this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him." (John 9:3 NIV) And then Jesus healed the man. And as still happens far too often today, the church refused to believe and threw out the one who had been healed just as they would soon throw out the prophet who had healed the man.

But as my spiritual director reminds me, when I find myself living in shame because of criticism or discontent among the saints, "Conrad, the church is not Jesus." And so, at the end of the story, Jesus finds the man freed from his blindness but rejected by the church. Jesus reaches out to him, has coffee with him, speaks love to his wounded heart, and brings salvation not only to his body but also to his soul.

I am not ashamed to say that I have struggled with mental health issues related mainly to OCD and its accompanying cousins of depression and anxiety. Nor am I ashamed to say that I have sought the help of healing professionals time and time again. And most of all, I am not ashamed to say that like William Cowper, I've also found that fountain which flows not from the church, but from the One who was broken just like me, wounded just like me, busted

just like me, and rejected just like me. And for this reason, he knows what it is like to be one of us—and why he will never stop seeking the sick, the lame, the cast-aways, the mentally ill, and just about everyone else living on the edges of their society. Why? Because he has so much more in common with them than with those who do not know they need a doctor.

In Mark 5, Jesus heals the Gerasene demoniac who had haunted the tombs with his rage, howls, and self-harm. But Jesus delivers him and sends his demons fleeing over the cliffs into the sea, embodied within a herd of swine. But rather than rejoice, those who witnessed this miracle of freedom and restoration begged Jesus to leave their region. Why? Who knows for sure? But the fact that this man's demons had been exorcised may have meant that the crowd too had begun to consider their own demons and the possible consequences of being set free. For freedom brings uncertainties, problems, questions, and disruption, and sometimes it is easier to remain bound up in our chains and hang out with our demons. And easier to ask Jesus to leave our church.

In Mark 6, Jesus comes to his hometown of Nazareth, only to find that the hometowners wanted nothing to do with him. Who was this Jesus anyway, other than a carpenter's son and the brother of James, Judas, and others? What exceptional pedigree did Jesus have? What education? And so, Mark records that because of their unbelief, Jesus was able to do only a few miracles among his family and friends.

I wonder how many of us, struggling with our demons, simply wander away from a church that, even when we are healed or freed, prefers to see us in our chains, all the while singing "Oh How I Love Jesus" and "Amazing Grace" and "Blessed Assurance" and on and on. It is one thing to declare the Good News and another thing altogether to allow that Good News to take root in our town and our church. Choosing to live in the darkness is the one sin that cannot be forgiven.

CHAPTER 2

A Letter to My Eighteen-Year-Old Self— There Will Always Be Enough Light

February 22, 2021

But now thus says the Lord,
he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel:
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you. (Isaiah 43:1-2)

Dear 18-year-old self,
I want you to know that whatever you face and whatever you experience—there will always be enough Light, that these words from Isaiah are true, the most profound Truth there is.

When as a sophomore at Wheaton College, you find yourself lost in the darkness of a rain forest, walking upstream through chest-high flood waters in Papua New Guinea—there will be enough Light.

When the torment of OCD—through all your childhood and into your adult life—convinces you day after day and night after night that hell is your destiny—there will be enough Light.

When you and Heidi are told that she will miscarry Jacob and that you just need to go home to wait for this to happen—there will be enough Light.

When you become aware that your young marriage is breaking up in a community where good people don't experience such things and where no one knows what to say to you—there will be enough Light.

When after you and Heidi separate, you must make a decision about whether to continue into a Ph.D. program or not—and choose to do so because you have no other options with a Master's degree in Rural Sociology, there will be enough Light.

When you and Heidi must make decisions about reuniting your marriage after more than two years of separation—and marital struggles remain, there will be enough Light.

When you and Heidi and Jacob reunite in Hershey, PA, and you have applications for a teaching job out all over the country, but no leads and no interviews and no offers—there will be enough Light.

When within months of moving back together, Elizabethtown College suddenly has an opening and offers you a temporary, one-year position—there will be enough Light.

When you are asked to lead Elizabethtown Mennonite Church while also in a tenure-track position—there will be enough Light.

When within months of your ordination, you are diagnosed with papillary thyroid cancer that will persist for three years through multiple surgeries and radioactive iodine treatments—there will be enough Light.

When within months of the diagnosis, there is an initiative calling for your resignation at the church—there will be enough Light.

When Heidi is diagnosed with ovarian cancer and you both are faced with the terror of what appears to be a death sentence—there will be enough Light.

When you and Heidi are called back to ministry together when you had always said it was God's grace that led you away after your first five-year stint—there will be enough Light.

When you slide off the cedar shingle roof of your home, looking up at the sky alone and with a broken hip—there will be enough Light.

When a year later you are diagnosed with salivary gland cancer, followed by surgery and radiation treatments—there will be enough Light.

When you begin to tremor two years later and hear the specialist at Penn Medical Center say that “there is no alternative diagnosis to Parkinson's Disease,”—there will be enough Light.

When what you will experience gives you a view of a landscape hidden from others, just remember that this “is your story and this is your song,” and it will always be yours to sing. And sing it you must.

And finally, remember that when you walk through the water and the fire for the last time—the Light that was always enough in the past will become the Light that embraces you and welcomes you Home.

CHAPTER 3

The Light of Pap Renno's Last Smile

August 31, 2020

When I visited my grandfather, “Pap” Erie Renno at Lewistown Hospital in the Fall of 2007, I was pretty sure that it would be our last visit. Pap was alert and smiling, talkative as usual, but his heart was failing him, and we knew his days were numbered. My last memory is of that unforgettable warm smile of Pap’s as I said goodbye and walked out the door.

Pap was known widely throughout the Mennonite Church in the mid-20th century. In the tenth grade, he had dropped out of high school to stay home and help with the farm, his father having died when Pap was just a teenager. But one day in the field, Pap heard God speak his name, sharing with him that he would be called into ministry.

Eventually, that day would come, and Pap was ordained at Locust Grove Mennonite Church in Belleville, PA, serving for several decades. But he also ministered broadly across the church. He was frequently called into congregations to mediate conflicts. He served on the Mission Board of Rosedale Mennonite Missions. He was invited to speak in communities when a whole week of “revival meetings” was the norm. It is not unusual still, thirteen years after his death at eighty-eight, to hear folks around the broader church expressing warm memories of Pap.

As one of Pap’s grandchildren, I remember him for many things, particularly for our frequent family gatherings. When we

showed up to visit, he was always happy to see us—breaking into an exuberant grin. He frequently told me how grateful he was that I was following Jesus and serving the church. His standard answer to troubles and difficulties was, “We can trust Jesus.” And before we would leave extended family gatherings, he almost always requested that we sing together “Jesus, loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong, they are weak, but he is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me, yes Jesus loves me, yes Jesus loves me. The Bible tells me so.” Pap loved to sing this simple song despite his inability to carry a tune. But he didn’t care, for this song obviously explained that smile I will never forget. I’ve often prayed for the kind of simple faith in and intimacy with Jesus that I saw in Pap. His was the most authentic and richest expression of piety I’ve ever witnessed.

Pap had known many challenges and difficulties. Called away during World War II from his young family to serve in a Civilian Public Service camp as a conscientious objector, struggling to be a successful farmer while also in the ministry, losing his oldest son to cancer, serving at a time when pastors were never expected to ask questions about self-care or were encouraged to set boundaries around their personal lives and families. And yet, he smiled.

One of Pap’s frequently expressed regrets was that he had dropped out of high school as a teenager. He never seemed to forgive himself for that, and I always got the sense that he felt his ministry was inferior because of his educational status. I tried to convince him otherwise, but I’m not sure that I ever really got through. To hear Pap preach and speak, one would have had no idea that he had never completed high school. His office was packed with books from floor to ceiling—he read and studied voraciously and was as highly educated as any church leader I’ve known. With little formal training, he was not intimidated by this perceived deficit, even if he did regret it.

I sometimes looked at Pap as he grew older and wondered what it would be like to know that one's years were numbered—that he would not live to see some of his grandchildren and great-grandchildren grow up. What was it like to see the horizon of one's life ahead, knowing that it was coming sooner rather than later? How did he live with the knowledge of his pending death while also living fully in the moment with that smile on his face? I'm sure I wondered this about other folks, but I especially remember pondering it about Pap. I think, because he always seemed to be so content.

Which reminds me of the words of the Apostle Paul, who said, “for I have learned to be content with whatever I have.” (Philippians 4:11b) Paul wrote these words near the end of his life. Paul had learned to be content the closer he got to the horizon of his life, the nearer he came to completing the race that Christ had set out before him. He became, it seems, more and more comfortable with the idea of his death, even looking forward to it with anticipation. Paul did so not with suicidal ideations—but out of the knowledge that what lay ahead would be so much grander than the momentary circumstances regardless of whether he was eating dry bread in prison or a gourmet meal in Rome or Ephesus. It just didn't matter—he was confident that what was coming on the horizon was a new heaven and new earth. When Christ called him home, he would be more than ready. “To live is Christ and to die is gain” is how that old saint put it.

Which reminds me of the line from the Heidelberg Catechism: “What is your only comfort in life and in death? That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.”⁴ It seems that God has a way of preparing the saints for their death, but only as they also learn that God is their comfort in this life. This God, who, as the saints remind us

⁴ <http://www.heidelberg-catechism.com/en/lords-days/1.html>.

again and again, is full of compassion and holds us in the safety and security of God's womb.

My diagnosis of Parkinson's disease has helped me to understand how Pap lived with such enthusiasm, passion, warmth, hope, and a smile that expressed all of that—because at some point, he had become honest with himself about the day of his death. For it is only as we acknowledge and are open to the day of our death that we can be fully open to the days of our living. In fact, we know from the literature on aging that happiness and life satisfaction can be illustrated by a U-curve. In the decades of one's 20-40s, life satisfaction declines but in the 50s and 60s, it begins to turn upward and increase. Why? Because as we age, most of us, in one way or another, start to deal with and accept the aging process and the limitations that it brings, and we choose to make the best of the days that remain.

As I told my students last week, Parkinson's Disease has given me a new view of the horizon of my life that I would never have gotten so early, and keeping my eyes on that horizon has caused not dread but joy. I now know what I want to do with my life and what I don't want to do. I'm not going to spend time on committees that do nothing. I'm not going to say yes to going out to lunch with those who just want to flatter me with empty praise or flatten me with criticism. No, I'm going to spend whatever good days I have with my dear wife and best friend, with my son and daughter-in-law and grandsons, with genuine friends, and with my students whom I so enjoy.

What does all of this have to do with a dismantled church? A lot, I think. If the church would begin to be more comfortable with our increased marginalization in American society, with our loss of status and authority and presence, even with the declines in participation and attendance, if we began to recognize that the horizon for the church as we've known and constructed it is fast approaching,

that the death of the church as we've known it has already occurred in many places throughout our country and is accelerating, we might just stop trying to cling to the safety and security promised by one politician after another seeking our vote. We might stop trying to emulate the culture that is quickly absorbing us, we might actually begin to live like the Jesus of the New Testament taught us to live, and we might be more willing to give up our lives than to gain the whole world.

What if the church simply acknowledged that God's Spirit is deconstructing us because we have failed God's mission and began to ask how God wants to use a dismantled church? What are his purposes for a dismantled church? How does he want to lead you and me into greater fruitfulness in a dismantled church?

A marginal position is a position from which the church has always been most alive and most vital and the position from which the church has most clearly seen God's reality and purposes and truth. Rather than denying our reality or working so hard to prevent what is inevitable, what if we helped the Spirit dismantle what is broken and deteriorating in the church, and like Paul, learned to be content whether in prison or in the buffet line? What if we began to embrace the coming horizon where the restored Kingdom lies just over the other side?

I suspect if we did so, the last thing that people might remember of us is our smile!