Politics From Space: Building Church in Fourth Century Milan and the Modern U.S. Strip Mall

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Introduction

Throughout my time working in religious studies, I have received countless blank stares from people who have just learned my course of study. In most circumstances, religious studies either turns out to be a conversational dead end or leads to some version of the question: "Oh alright… so… what do you want to do with *that*?" It only took a few weeks of classes to know that the answer, let alone the approaches to this question, would be endlessly complicated. As someone who neither wants to retreat into the professionalism of "being an academic" nor desires to abandon religious studies for the "real world," I acutely feel the weight of this question. I am still looking for a satisfying response for my peers in the academy and for the 'normal' people with whom I interact on a daily basis— friends, neighbors, and employers. A large part of my inability to give a 'good' answer hinges upon increasingly polarized visions of what the *'that'* of religious studies precisely entails.

As an undergraduate and now as a master's student, I have had the freedom to work across several disciplines without the rigorous doctoral demands for specialization. Although this freedom has allowed me to pursue several academic interests, it has also illuminated and placed me in the midst of sharp tensions between descriptive and prescriptive approaches to the study of religion. My historical training has equipped me with primarily descriptive methods, which seek to identify and articulate the various theological, political, and social dynamics at play in religious phenomena. My work around normative theological ethics, as its name suggests, has taught me to engage religious studies as a prescriptive project— a resource from which we can gain the valuable tools for evaluating, critiquing, and altering problematic theological, political, and social arrangements. The problem I commonly run into—whether it be with professors,

pastors, or peers— is that it is somehow inappropriate to join these two modes of scholarship together.

The problem is not that we have totally failed to recognize any overlap between the various descriptive and the prescriptive methods in religious studies. Many people will grant that most descriptions either grow out of or promote a set of prescriptions and most prescriptions are contingent upon a set of descriptions about a certain state of affairs. My challenge has been in coordinating these two modes of reflection in a single line of inquiry, preserving the distinct advantages of each approach. At its most broad level, this project is an attempt to uncover such a method. I go about this task by exploring the concrete ways in which prescriptive political programs can arise from seemingly neutral spaces. I ground my work in two different areas of study.

In the first part, working in the historical register, I examine Ambrose's descriptions of virginal bodies that prescribed a position both for the virgin within the church hierarchy and the church within the larger Roman society. I focus on how the virgin's location in sacred space helped generate her distinct identity and how Ambrose's spatial rhetoric of virginity aided the production of the sacred space of the church. In the second part, working in the key of normative ethics, I look at several modern prescriptions for the relationship between space and politics and then use these resources to describe the position of an evangelically oriented mega-church, which now hosts its worship services in a converted strip mall. Both parts look at church building as a site where prescriptions and descriptions are often conflated and will provide a context for reflecting on the ways we can better join the two. With this brief word of framing in mind, let us turn to the world of fourth century Milan.

I. Ambrose: Sacred Space, Social differentiation, and Symbolic Power

During the fourth century, Milan was in a period of transition that yielded significant changes in the physical, political, and religious landscape of the city. As Constantinople solidified as the eastern center of the Roman Empire, Milan attempted to bolster its position in the imperial west through a series of major infrastructure improvements and public building programs. As the pagan state religion started to yield to Christianity, Milan became a battleground for emerging rival theologies, leaving as large a mark in the Western theological imagination as it did in the material landscape. In the latter half of the fourth century, these two currents intersected, placing Milan at the heart of several topographic, political, spiritual, and intellectual changes. In this section, I attempt to illustrate some of the ways Ambrose inhabited this time of transition by drawing attention to the interlocking spatial dimensions of rituals and discourses on virginity, which he used to establish church hierarchy, to generate the sacredness of the basilica, and to bolster the church's position in its struggles with Milanese families and the contamination of the *saeculum*.

This section is divided into two parts. First, I engage David G. Hunter's description of sacred space and virginal consecration ceremonies in fourth century Milan, exploring how the virgin's placement in 'sacred' space created a distinct 'social' space for her within the hierarchy of the church. Second, I focus Ambrose's spatial descriptions of virginity in *De virginibus*, examining how the *integritas* of the virgin's body produced prescriptions about the sacred space of the basilica and the church's position toward Roman society. Moving toward their synthesis, both of these parts should illustrate the significance of space— both in its physical and material dimensions— and the mechanics by which space may translate into a politics.

In his essay *Sacred Space, Virginal Consecration, and Symbolic Power*, Hunter examines the ways in which the liturgical practice of consecrating virgins provided the language and images necessary to construct a distinct 'social space' for the consecrated virgin, the bishop, and the Christian laity. Hunter presents his case in three steps— reconstructing, as far as possible, the ritual of virginal consecration (*velatio*), offering a theoretical account of how this ritual translated into actual social differences, and examining symbols generated by this ceremony, which Ambrose used to authenticate these social differences. Sketching out Hunter's threefold framework will provide a basic picture of the manner in which space, particularly the sacred space of the basilica, forms and maintains hierarchies.

Hunter begins his essay by synthesizing the available textual and archeological evidence to recreate the aspects of the *velatio* ceremony that empirically demonstrated the virgin's distinction within the church. Relying heavily on Ambrose's textual references to the *velatio*, Hunter depicts the general setting of the event as it took place on Easter. Although it is well attested that *velatio* ceremonies occurred on many other feast days throughout the year, the Easter ceremony uniquely highlighted the visual and spatial dimensions of the ritual, which served to distinguish and elevate the virgin's identity.[1]

We will begin by considering the visual dimensions of the Easter ritual. The virgin would be seen entering the basilica among the newly baptized or, as the author of *De lapsu virginis* describes, "amidst the shining lights of the neophytes, among the white-garbed candidates of the Kingdom of Heaven, as one about to wed a King."[2] Her appearance among the candles and white robes of Christian initiates would have been an aesthetically striking moment in the ritual that was imbued with both theological and social significance. For Ambrose, the white garments of

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[1] See *De virginibus* 3.1.1, where Ambrose testifies to Marcellina's veiling on "the day on which the virgin received
[2] *De lapsu virginis*, 5.9; Trans. Maureen Tilley. Once attributed to Ambrose, the text is now credited to Nicetas of Remesiana.

baptism symbolized purity, the putting off of sin, and the putting on of the chaste veil of innocence.[3] Since the virgin "represented the primary example of that sexual purity possessed only fleetingly by the newly baptized," her entrance would have indicated her special status within the Christian community.[4] The virgin's appearance among the neophytes visually established her distinction.

Let us now consider the spatial dimensions of the ritual. In fourth century Milan, baptisms often took place 'offstage' in a baptistery separated from the main church. Although 'centralized' baptisteries—i.e. baptisteries directly attached to the church— seemed to be the predominant style for many late antique churches in northern Italy, Milan offered several examples of 'freestanding' baptisteries.[5] One such baptistery was located near the cathedral of Milan dedicated to St. Thecla, where Ambrose would have presided over numerous baptisms.[6] Whereas the baptism of the neophytes likely occurred in this separate space, virginal consecration took place 'onstage,' in the more public center of the church. The juxtaposing of 'offstage' and 'onstage' demonstrates how space served to emphasize the significance of the virgin's consecration over that of baptism.

After describing the general spatial setting of the Easter *velatio*, Hunter turns his attention more specifically to the location of the virgin's consecration at the altar. In order to appreciate this positioning, we must briefly unpack Hunter's conception of sacred space. Relying on the work of Ann Marie Yasin— who challenges 'locative' conceptions of sacred space as a place in which the sacred is simply resident or contained— Hunter takes on a model that emphasizes

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[3] Ambrose, *De mysteriis* 7.34

[4] Hunter, David G. "Sacred Space, Virginal Consecration, and Symbolic Power." *Spaces in Late Antiquity: Cultural, Theological and Archaeological Perspectives*. Ed. Juliette Day, Raimo Hakola, Maijastina Kahlos, and Ulla Tervahauta. New York: Routledge, 2016; p.93

[5] Browersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar. *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*. Cambridge: Belknap of Harvard UP, 2000; p.332-334

[6] Krautheimer, Richard. *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*. 4th ed. Yale UP, 1975; p.84

different degrees of holiness within a sacred space, which can reflect or generate different degrees of social stratification.[7] When the virgin is consecrated at the altar— the center of a basilica's sacrality— she is accorded higher degrees of sacredness and is elevated in the ecclesial hierarchy. As Hunter details, this location would have encouraged observers "to link the virgin's consecration with the Eucharistic sacrifice of Christ and would have emphasized the bishop's priestly duty of consecrating virgins and offering the Eucharist."[8] Although this location may have increased the consecrated virgin's status, it also underscored the greater authority of the Christian bishop.

Hunter concludes his reconstruction of the *velatio* ceremony by postulating a separate area of the basilica for the consecrated virgin and her companions. The only evidence Hunter cites is a passage from *De lapsu virginis,* which depicts an inscribed partitioning wall:

> Don't you remember the place where you stood in the church separated by boards… You have to remember, don't you, those precepts, which the inscribed wall itself flung at your eyes: 'The married woman and the virgin differ: the one who is not married thinks not about the affairs of the Lord, how she might be holy in body and soul.'[9]

In another reconstruction of the *velatio* ceremony, Peter Brown identifies a pure white marble railing that clearly marked virgins off from the rest of the basilica, but only cites evidence referring to a later period.[10] If these accounts accurately reflect the fourth century arrangement of churches in northern Italy, then it provides a substantial example of the spatial elements of the

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[7] Hunter, "Sacred Space," p.90. For a more detailed account of Yasin's the theory of sacred space, see Ann Marie Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces in the Late Antique Mediterranean*: *Architecture, Cult and Community* (Cambridge 2009). Also operative in Hunter's work is Jonathan Z. Smith's, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago 1987) and Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge 1999)/
[8] Hunter, "Sacred Space," p.94. Also see *De Virginibus* 1.7.38 and 1.11.65 references
[9] *De lapsu virginis* 6.24, Trans. Tilley: *"Nonne vel illum loctum tabulis separatum, in quo in Ecclesia stabas, recordari debuisti, ad quem religiosae matronae et nobiles certatim currebant, tua oscula petentes, quae sanctiores et digniores te erant? Nonne vel illa praecepta quae oculis tuis ipse scriptus paries ingerebat, recodari debuisti: divisa est mulier et virgo: quae non est nupta, cogitate quae Domini sunt, quomodo sit sancta corpore et spiritu."*
[10] Brown, Peter. *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. New York: Columbia UP, 2008; p.356

velatio ceremony creating a physically distinct identity for the virgin. But given only the single textual reference from the period we are examining, it is best to leave this as conjecture.

Regardless of whether the partitioning wall was actually a feature of a fourth century church, the other spatial dimensions of the virginal consecration ceremony marked the virgin out as one with a distinct hierarchical position— above the ordinary members of the congregation and under the bishop. We will now turn to Hunter's second claim that the sacred space of the church building also served as the context for the construction of a 'social space,' that is, "a field of social relations in which the various participants— the clergy, laity, and consecrated virgins— each received their distinctive identities."[11] Put more simply, we will investigate how the spatial distinction of the virgin in the ritual of virginal consecration translated into concrete social differences.

To help articulate this transition, Hunter draws on the work of ritual theorists Catherine Bell and Pierre Bourdieu. The first step in the generation of social differences rests in the production of ritualized bodies. "A ritualized body," Bell defines, "is a body aware of a privileged contrast with respect to other bodies, that is, a body invested with schemes, the deployment of which can shift a variety of sociocultural situations into ones that the ritualized body can dominate in some way."[12] A body acquires these 'schemes of privileged contrasts' through a series of physical movements — i.e. the entrance of the virgin with the neophytes, her veiling at the altar, and the conjectured separate area for consecrated virgins— that serve to create a distinct ritual environment. This environment, which includes, but is not limited to, the physical space of the church, molds the bodies placed within it by generating contrasts between those bodies. This process, which generates of rank and hierarchy, is perceived "as values and

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[11] Hunter, "Sacred Space," p.96

[12] Catherine Bell, "The Ritual Body and the Dynamics of Ritual Power," JRitSt 4 (1990), p.304-5. Quoted in Hunter p.96

experiences impressed upon a person from without."[13] In order to understand how these lines

gain concrete authority, we must turn to Bourdieu.

Bourdieu develops two concepts important for Hunter's account of the movement from

'sacred space' to 'social space.' First, Bourdieu helpfully names some of the mechanics at play

in ritualizing bodies, asserting that ritual consecrations function as acts of 'social magic' that

establish new boundaries or differences, which are thereby considered legitimate or natural.

"Such rites," Hunter claims, "genuinely transform the persons who are consecrated by

transforming the way that other people perceive and treat them, as well as the way that the

consecrated persons perceive and treat themselves."[14] The efficacy of these rites of institution—

their ability to change people's social perceptions — hinges upon their ability "to act on the real

by acting on the representation of the real."[15] As such, space becomes crucial because it is the

material through which these perceptions may be acted upon. In our case, by changing the

consecrated virgin's placement in the *velatio* ceremony, one can change peoples' perceptions of

the virgin.

The second concept Bourdieu draws to our attention is that simply acting on material

space is not enough to generate social difference; it also requires the naming and recognition of

social divisions by an authorized agent. An authorized agent is "one whom the community

recognizes has the authority to 'create worlds (i.e. to make groups) by speaking and defining

their existence."[16] One gains this power to authorize, in large part, by acquiring 'symbolic'

capital. Bourdieu describes:

> Symbolic power has to be based on the possession of symbolic capital. The power to impose on
> other minds a vision, new or old, of social divisions depends on the social authority acquired in

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[13] ibid

[14] Hunter, "Sacred Space" p.97

[15] Bourdieu, "Rites and Acts of Institution," p.82; quoted in Hunter, p.97

[16] Hunter, "Sacred Space," p.98

previous struggles. Symbolic capital is a credit; it is the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to impose a position of recognition.[17]

Framed in the context of virginal consecration, the rite could only be effective when conducted by a Christian bishop whom the community gave the authority to speak and act on their behalf. This is why Ambrose's discourses on virginity become so important: they name and recognize, and thereby authorize the special status of the consecrated virgins. But, before we examine the particulars of this naming, we should note one important feature of how Ambrose generated symbolic capital.

Hunter passes over the fact that Ambrose's symbolic capital would have been earned, at least in part, through his specific building program. Take for example, the basilica Ambrosiana, which was likely among the bishop's first building initiatives. As a massive building, which dwarfed the surrounding monuments of the Hortus Philippi, it inevitably generated some topographic casualties. The basilica absorbed the nearby grave of Saint Victor and occasioned the plunder of the shrine of the distinguished Milanese saints, Nabor and Felix, effectively reorganizing the religious topography of the entire area.[18] In what seemed to be an unusual and unprecedented move in Milan, Ambrose planned his interment underneath the Ambrosiana's altar, at the center of this new religious landscape. Although the announcement of his decision in 386 drew some protest and ultimately led him to share the place with two local martyrs, it illustrates that Ambrose had "sufficient recognition to impose a position of recognition."

We should also note that Ambrose's planned interment under the altar not only aided the accquistion of a merely 'religious' symbolic capital, but also had a directly political effect. Many later commentators pick up on the political significance of the move. Neil McLynn describes it

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[17] Bourdieu, 'Social Space and Symbolic Power,' p.22
[18] McLynn, Neil B. *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital*. Berkeley: U Of California, 2014; p.227, 277

as "a dramatic decision that reflects the intensity of the struggle with Valentinian."[19] Richard

Krautheimer conjectures this positioning was an "implicit riposte to Constantine's first burial

place under or near the altar in the chancel area of the church of the Holy Apostles in

Constantinople."[20] We should also note that Ambrose liquidated a large portion of church plate

in order to fund the project. This helped dismantle the legacy of the bishop's anti-Nicene

predecessor Auxentius and the emperor Constantius, who had probably supplied many of the

liquidated items.[21] If the political audacity of the Ambrosiana, and Ambrose's planned interment

underneath, is not responsible for generating the 'social authority acquired in previous struggles,'

they certainly reflect an immense amount of symbolic capital already possessed. In short,

Ambrose relied on building to acquire the social capital necessary to authorize the spatial

distinctions generated in the *velatio* ceremony. With this in mind, we may now turn to the final

step in Hunter's project of investigating the symbols, which Ambrose uses to name and

recognize the consecrated virgin's distinction. I will examine Ambrose's symbols of the virgin as

'bride of Christ' and as 'priest/sacrifice,' which highlight the liturgical dimensions of virginity

and authorize the virgin's distinction, paying close attention to how they connect the consecrated

virgin to the church and fit her into social hierarchies.

Although the *velatio* ceremony imitates an ordinary roman marriage ceremony in many

respects, Ambrose appeals to the symbol of virgin as the 'bride of Christ' to underscore the

contrast of ordinary marriage and the 'spiritual' marriage of the consecrated virgin. The symbol

often operates by contrasting the benefits of the virgin's heavenly husband over those of an

earthly bridegroom. The first book of *De virginibus* concludes with the story of a virgin being

urged to marry by her relatives and kinsfolk. Ambrose narrates her response:

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[19] McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan;* p.229

[20] Krautheimer, Richard. *Three Christian Capitals: Topography and Politics*. Berkeley: U of Calif., 1983; p.79

[21] McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan;* p.56

> Why are you upset, my kinsfolk? Why do you trouble yourselves by continuing your matchmaking? I have already been provided for. Are you offering me a bridegroom? I have found a better one. Extol whatever riches he has, boast of his distinction, talk up his power: I have one who is without compare—rich in the world, powerful in authority, distinguished in heaven. If you have one such, I will not turn him down. If you have not found him, you are not acting to my benefit, my relatives, but behaving grudgingly.[22]

This passage not only privileges the benefits of the virgin's spiritual husband but also reveals something of the contested social context in which Ambrose was working. Throughout *De virginibus*, Ambrose reports the complaints of parents objecting to their daughters' pledges of virginity. This conflict can be more clearly seen in the ways Ambrose conflates the virgin and the church.

Following earlier Christian tradition, Ambrose describes both the church and the Virgin Mary as the 'bride of Christ,' which intensifies the symbolic power of the symbol when applied to the consecrated virgin. As Hunter specifies, "By characterizing the consecrated virgin as the 'bride of Christ,' Ambrose is able to ascribe to the individual Christian virgin all of the purity and spiritual stature that he had previously attributed to the church."[23] Although this symbol lent symbolic power to the virgin, enhancing the status of consecrated virgins in the church, it also "constructed an authoritative persona for the Christian bishop as that of the surrogate *pater*."[24] After the ritual of virginal consecration, the bishop often took on the quasi-parental role, overseeing the virgin's spiritual, and sometimes, physical care, effectively becoming a new *paterfamilias*.[25] This was a significant strategic move in the financial conflict between church and family vying for possession of the virgin's inheritance. I will examine the details of this conflict later on. For now, it is enough to note that Ambrose used the symbol of the 'bride of

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[22] *De virginibus* 1.11.65; trans Ramsey
[23] Hunter, David G. "The Virgin, the Bride, and the Church: Reading Psalm 45 in Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine." *Church History*, vol. 69, no. 2, 2000; p.286-7
[24] Hunter, "The Virgin, the Bride, and the Church," p.290
[25] Hunter, "The Virgin, the Bride, and the Church," p.289

Christ' to suggest commonalities and contrasts between consecrated virgins and ordinary married women and to enhance his position within a wider political struggle.

The second symbol Hunter identifies is that of the virgin as 'priest/sacrifice.' In portraying the consecrated virgin as both priest and sacrifice, Ambrose elevated the virgin's position in the ecclesial hierarchy. One example is his description of a virgin who is both a priesthood of chastity and sacrifice for her mother:

> You have heard, O Parents, in what virtues you ought to raise and with what discipline you ought to instruct your daughters, so that you may have ones by whose merits your own sins may be forgiven. A virgin is a gift of God, a protection for her family, a priesthood of chastity (*sacerdotium castitatis*). A virgin is an offering for her mother (*matris hostia*), by whose daily sacrifice the divine power is appeased.[26]

This accords the virgin a special theological role that was not available to lay members of the congregation. This passage, addressed to the parents, also appears to be speaking to the broader political tension between *familia* and *ecclesia*. Ambrose navigates this tension by detailing some of the priestly benefits a consecrated daughter may provide for the parents.

If this was not enough to convince parents to relinquish control of the virgin, Ambrose furthers the ecclesial claim on the virgin by conflating her with the church building, specifically the altar. Intensifying the virgin's placement at the altar during the *velatio* ceremony, Ambrose describes the virgin's soul as an altar:

> For I would not doubt that these altars are accessible to you whose souls I would confidently call altars of God, upon which Christ is daily sacrificed for the redemption of your body. For if a virgin's body is a temple of God, what is her soul, which, when the ashes of its members, so to speak, have been stirred by the hand of the eternal priest, exhales the warmth of the divine fire, once it has been covered again?[27]

This is important because it establishes an analogue between the virginal body and the church building. The virgin is not simply more at home in the church. To a certain extent, she reflects

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[26] *De virginibus* 1.7.32; trans Ramsey; quoted in Hunter p.100
[27] *De virginibus* 2.2.18; trans Ramsey

and embodies the church itself.[28] Through this conceptual conflation, the virgin is accorded a greater significance both within and beyond the walls of the church. This conflation also establishes Ambrose's authority over the virgin. As the bishop presides over the altar, so too may he preside over the virgin's soul, strengthening his role as a surrogate *paterfamilias*. In short, the symbols of 'bride of Christ' and 'priest/sacrifice' established the virgin's distinct identity through connecting the virgin to the church. This was empowering— according her with higher degrees of theological significance— and limiting, placing her under the strict rules, regulations, and guidance of the bishop. Both symbols allowed the bishop to navigate the broader political background of the tensions of church and family.

Hunter's focus on these liturgical symbols is illuminating, but it only moves in one direction, emphasizing how the virgin's 'social space' grows out of her physical position in and conceptual connection to 'sacred space.' Despite his initial interest on 'the sacrality of space,' Hunter often leaves underdeveloped the spatial dimensions of Ambrose's descriptions of virginity that inform not only the consecrated virgin's position in social hierarchies, but her role in generating them. In the next section, I will attempt to draw out these dynamics.

II. The Political Ramifications of Ambrose's Spatial Rhetoric on Virginity

In *De virginibus*, Ambrose employs a series of spatial images to aid his description of the virgin. I argue that these images further develop the relation between sacred space, the consecrated virgin, and the broader political context, illustrating the virgin's role in the production of sacred space. I have broadly categorized these images under the headings of *patria castitatis* and *aula pudoris*. To make my case, I will examine the context, deployment, and effect

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[28] This can overlap can also be seen in *Exhortatio virginitatis* 2.10, where Ambrose sets up a rhetorical interplay between the *templa* of the virgin's body and the *templum* of the church, effectively re-gendering the neuter noun *templum*.

of each of these categories. Before we begin, however, it will be useful to understand two larger aspects of Ambrose's thinking and context.

First, we should note that Ambrose's conceptual system operates with a series of sharp antitheses: "Christian and pagan," "Catholic and heretic," "Bible truth and 'worldly' guesswork," "Church and *saeculum*," and "soul and body." [29] It was tantamount to preserve the sharp contrast of these categories because conceding any mixture meant falling to the "ancient shame of the Roman male of becoming soft, being effeminated."[30] Through his spatial description of virginity, Ambrose was able to articulate and promote the separation of these antitheses, which in turn extended to a thesis about the church's political position in the Western Empire and theological position in the midst of rival Homoioan theologies. What is at stake with virginity is not just talk of hierarchy but the "absolute nature of the boundaries that separated the Catholic Church from the world, as well as those which rendered individual virgins irrevocably 'sacred' by reason of their vocation, and separate from their families."[31]

The second thing we need to bear in mind, which I have briefly touched on, is the conflict between *ecclesia* and *familia.* In the fourth century, northern Italy remained a deeply traditional society grounded in the *mos maiorum* and, for this reason, pagan worship remained a central part of public life. As Peter Brown notes, "a public career exposed the upper-class Christian to the smell of the sacrificial altar… In pagan families, sons continued to follow the religion of their fathers in public, long after their mothers and wives had brought Christianity into the house."[32] This generated tensions within the Roman family. As long as men wished to remain in the public sphere, they had to refuse the exclusive interests and controls of the church, while the women

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[29] Brown, *Body and Society*; p.347
[30] ibid
[31] Brown, *Body and Society*; p.353
[32] Brown, *Body and Society*; p.343. Also see Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman Household*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge UP, 2011.

were free to, and often did, commit themselves to the church. What made this a contentious matter of public concern was the fact that the majority of the women dedicating themselves to the church as virgins were the daughters of widows.

The death of a woman's father meant two things—she would have considerable inherited wealth and she was free to spend it without the oversight of a *pater*. At the time, the church was in desperate need of lay patrons. As Brown notes, "Few provincial churches possessed extensive estates of their own: they depended on intermittent gifts of ready money and of valuables such as pious noblewomen could provide."[33] As more and more women began to dedicate themselves to virginity under Ambrose, the church gained a significant amount of capital, which threatened the publically pagan elite. Thus, we should not only view Ambrose's discourses on virginity "as exhortations to a sheltered piety," but as treatises written "to change upper-class opinion— to persuade emperors, prefects, and provincial governors to allow wealthy widows and virgins to remain dedicated to the Church, and to tolerate the redirection of parts of the wealth of great families, through such women, to pious causes."[34] Through this financial backdrop, we see virginity located within a series of political and theological power relations—between church, family, and state. It is within this wider context that we will view *patria castitatis* and *aula pudoris*, a task to which we now turn.

After making an argument to distinguish the virginity of Christians from that of the pagans (*gentes*) and barbarians (*barbari*), Ambrose provides the virgin with what McLynn calls "the necessary concomitants of aristocracy," a patria and lineage.[35] Given the political framing, content, and purpose of this description, it is worth quoting Ambrose in full:

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[33] Brown, *Body and Society*; p.344
[34] Brown, *Body and Society*; p.345
[35] McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, p.62

> It is the custom in encomiums (*laudationibus*) to speak of country and parentage of the subject, that the greatness of the offspring may be enhanced by mention of the father. Now I, who have not undertaken to praise but to set forth virginity, yet think it to the purpose to make known its country and its parent. First, let us settle where is its country. Now, if one's country be there where is the home of one's birth, without doubt heaven is the native country of chastity. And so she is a stranger here, but an inhabitant there.[36]

By invoking *laudationes*, Ambrose frames his argument in the traditional registers of Latin public discourse. Many notable Latin authors— such as Cicero, Suetonius, Quintilian, and Livy — employ *laudationes* as a type of speech with a specifically public character, whether it be consular election speeches, imperial panegyrics, legal testimonies, or funeral orations.[37] *Laudationes* often have the effect of rhetorically positioning a figure in order to achieve some political end.[38] Following a standard trope of a *laudatio*, mentioning a person's country and parentage, Ambrose signals that virginity too has a certain degree of public and political importance.

At the same time, it is important to note that Ambrose reminds his readers that he is not taking up the *laudationem* of virginity but its *expressionem*. This is not because the virgin is unworthy of the public recognition or irrelevant to public discourse but because she already enjoys it. "Praise is long enough," Ambrose clarifies, "which is not sought, but is held. Therefore let genius cease and let eloquence fall silent. There is one voice of commendation… no one is more praiseworthy than the one whom can be praised by men. As many men, so many

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[36] *De virginibus,* 1.5.20; Trans. H. de Romestin, H.T.F. Duckworth. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, Vol. 10. ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1896) modified: "*In laudationibus solet patria praedicari et parentes; ut commemoratione auctoris dignitas successionis exaggeretur: ego licet laudationem non susceperim virginitatis, sed expressionem; ad rem tamen pertinere arbitror, ut quae sit ei patria, quis auctor, appareat. Ac prius ubi sit patria definiamus. Si enim ibi est patria, ubi genitale domicilium: in coelo profecto est patria castitatis. Itaque hic advena, ibi incola est.*"

[37] Suetonius, *Divus Augustus* 56, refers to Augustus' *laudatio* as a public legal testimony something "*judicialis.*" Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria,* Book 3.7.2, *laudatio* as a public speech; and Livy, *The History of Rome,* Book 5.50, eulogy occasioned by a funeral.

[38] See Cicero, *Epistulae ad familares* 15.6, where he thanks Cato the younger for a *laudatio* he gave on his behalf in the senate during his pursuit of the consulship.

proclaimers..."[39] The words used for praise and commendation, '*praedico*' and '*praeconius*,' both contain the notion of publicity, that is, of presenting or announcing in public. [40] Looking back to Hunter, this amplifies the public location of virginal consecration in the center of the church as opposed the 'offstage' position of baptism. This public framing also signifies a broader political move in the tension between *ecclesia* and *familia*, which will become clearer as we examine the content of the *patria* and *parentes*.

A *patria,* as Ambrose describes, is the *genitale domicilium*, the place of one's birth. In identifying the *patria* of chastity as heaven, the bishop sets up a series of contrasts that underscore the virgin's distinction and emphasize her implications for larger political context. First, this draws attention back to Ambrose's earlier line about the Christian virgin's distinction from pagan and barbarian virgins. In his earlier tirade, Ambrose conceded some similarities between the two groups: "… we share the common features of an earthly body, and do not differ in the way we beget offspring."[41] The Christian virgin is distinct because of the location of her birth. Her heavenly *patria* not only distinguishes the consecrated virgin from the pagan and barbarian, but also distances her from the *familia* by displacing her earthly fatherland. More specifically, the consecrated virgin's *patria* preserves the sharp antithesis between her and the pagans and barbarians, and distances her earthly father, opening room for Ambrose to assert himself as surrogate *pater*.

Ambrose later recalls the spatial juxtaposition of "a stranger here, but an inhabitant there" to distinguish the consecrated virgin from ordinary married women. In his exegesis of

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[39] *De virginibus*, 1.2.6: "*Praedicabo virginem. Satis prolixa laudatio est, quae non quaeritur, sed tenetur. Facessant igitur ingenia, eloquentia conticescat, vox una praeconium est… Nemo est laudabilior, quam qui ab hominibus laudari potest. Quot homines, tot praecones…*"

[40] Lewis, Charlton T., and Charles Short. *Latin Dictionary* London: Oxford UP; praedico, praeconium

[41]*De virginibus* 1.4.14; trans. Ramsey: "*vulgarem terreni corporis participamus statum, generandi quoque non discrepamus usu*"

1 Corinthians 7, Ambrose explains, "The one does not sin, if she marries; but the other, if she does not marry, is immortal (*aeterna*). *There* is the remedy for weakness, *here* is the glory of chastity."[42] Ambrose's spatial rhetoric, beyond distinguishing the virgin from the ordinary married women, helps generate the sacred space. Hailing from heaven, the virgin makes present immortality (*aeternitas*) and glory. As Peter Brown puts it, "The consecrated virgins brought into the Christian household and the Christian basilicas a breath of immortality."[43] Her being present in a particular space imbues that place with a sense of that sacredness. The 'here/there' spatial rhetoric also resonates with Yasin's gradated sense of sacred space and may add some support to Hunter's conjecture about the separate area for consecrated virgins in the basilica, though it does not come close to proving anything. Simply put, the spatial deployment of the *patria* of virginity helps generate sacred space and is a tool Ambrose uses to navigate his larger political context.

These themes are also present in Ambrose's commemoration of the *auctor* of chastity. It will prove useful to mention a few things about the word '*auctor*,' which has a fairly wide semantic range. In its broadest sense, it refers to anyone who brings about the existence of something, but as Lewis and Short note, the word is "to be differently translated according to the object."[44] In the context, *auctor* appears to contain some of connotation of 'parent,' but looking at its abstract object, *virginitas* — as opposed to the personal *virgo* — it must also contain some other larger valences. A virgin can have a father, but the abstract concept of virginity itself needs something more like a creator, author, founder, or perhaps even builder. If Ambrose wanted to narrow the semantic range to simply the paternal, he may have used the word *pater,* instead he

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[42]*De virginibus* 1.6.24; Trans Ramsey modified: "*Illa non peccat, si nubat: haec si non nubat, aeterna est. Ibi remedium infirmitatis, hic gloria castitatis. Illa non reprehenditur, ista laudatur.*" '*Aeterna*' notably also harkens back to a line Ambrose used against the 'pagans' that their virgins were less sacred because they only served for a set term.

[43]Brown, *Body and Society;* p.343

[44] Lewis, Charlton T., and Charles Short. *Latin Dictionary* London: Oxford UP; *auctor* definition I.a

chooses the wider *auctor*, which seems to be a strategic political move in the conflict between *ecclesia* and *familia*. The choice of *auctor* over *pater* emphasizes the belonging of the virgin to the ecclesial rather than to the familial. This choice was also an important theological move.

While Ambrose was bishop, Milan was in a period of doctrinal conflict. Commemorating the *auctor* of virginity provided space for Ambrose to advance his Nicene Christology and to preserve the sharp antithesis between church and society. He writes:

> But what is virginal chastity if not purity untouched by contamination? And whom could we consider its author if not the immaculate son of God, whose flesh saw no corruption and whose divinity new no contamination? See then how great the merits of virginity are. Christ was before the virgin; Christ was from the virgin. He was born of the Father before the ages, to be sure, but he was born of the virgin on account of the ages. The former was of his nature; the later was for our sake.[45]

If virginity is purity without contamination— so the argument goes — the *auctor* of virginity could only be one who also knew no contamination. This establishes a special connection between Christ and virgins as those who share a special type of purity.[46] This privileged connection with Christ highlights one of the distinct merits of virginity and illuminates how she may have contributed to the creation of a 'pure' sense sacred space, that is, one uncontaminated by the touch of Pagan society. Ambrose appears to have been deeply concerned about the relationship of the church and Roman society. As Brown notes, "He was dominated by a need to assert the position of the Church as an inviolably holy body, possessed of unchallengeable, because divine, authority."[47] Through describing virginity and its *auctor* as bodies free from contamination, Ambrose sets out a vision for the church free from Homoioan contamination and wider Roman influence. The virgin's presence in the Basilica served as a representation and

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[45] *De virginibus*. 1.5.21; Trans Ramsey: "*Quid autem est castitas virginalis, nisi expers contagionis integritas? Atque ejus auctorem quem possumus aestimare, nisi immaculatum Dei Filium, cujus caro non vidit corruptionem, divinitas non est experta contagionem*"?

[46] Ambrose draws this connection further by speaking of Christ as the virgin who bore and nourishes the church in *De virginibus* 1.5.22: "*Virgo est ergo quae nupsit, virgo quae nos suo utero portavit, virgo quae genuit, virgo quae proprio lacte nutrivit…*"

[47] Brown, *Body and Society;* p.346

reminder of this immaculate space. With this description in mind, we may now turn more specifically toward Ambrose's goal in mentioning the *patria* and *auctor* of virginity.

In a *laudatio*, the intended effect of this trope is, as Ambrose describes, "that, with the commemoration of the author, the *dignitas* of the offspring might be increased."[48] *Dignitas,* means something like 'worth' or 'merit' but these translations often do not convey the word's political connotations. In his essay "*Auctoritas, Dignitas, Otium*," J.P.V.D. Balsdon illustrates the political dimensions of *dignitas* by uncovering its connection to the Roman virtue of *auctoritas*—the principle by which the senate spoke, operated, and acted. Balsdon concludes, "In politics a man's *dignitas* was his good name-that '*bona aestimatio'* on which Gaius Gracchus[49] laid such stress. It was his reputation and standing. The concept was one of overwhelming importance to every outstanding politician of the late Republic."[50] For our purposes, Ambrose's attempt to increase the *dignitas* of the virgin through the spatially determined *patria,* highlights her political import.

In book two of *De virginibus*, Ambrose recounts a story that helpfully ties together and complicates these themes. He describes a virgin at Antioch who fled public sight (*fuit fugitans publici visus*), but because of her beauty became an object of public attention. After the crowd negatively received her declaration of celibacy, the virgin was given an ultimatum—sacrifice to the pagan gods or be sent to a brothel. Ambrose narrates the virgin's thought process through the example of Judith: "For if she who entrusted herself to religion (*religioni*) both preserved her chastity (*pudicitiam*) and her country (*patriam*), perhaps I, by preserving my religion, shall also preserve my chastity. But if Judith had preferred her chastity to her religion, when her country

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[48] *De Virginibus* 1.5.21; quoted above
[49] Gaius Gracchus was a Roman Popularis politician in the 2nd century BC, arguably one of the most influential social reformers in the Roman republic
[50] J. P. V. D. Balsdon. "Auctoritas, Dignitas, Otium." *The Classical Quarterly*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1960, pp. 43–50.

had been lost, she would also have lost her chastity."[51] The story of Judith shows us that chastity depends first upon the preservation of *religio* and second on *patria*, underscoring the connection and tension between virginity, politics, and religion. Following Judith's example, the Antiochian virgin chose to preserve her religion and was sent to a brothel.

Once inside the brothel, however, a solider miraculously appeared and exchanged clothes with the virgin so that she might escape. The transformation of the virgin into a solider marks another significant shift. Her virginity is no longer a private sheltered piety but takes on the publically oriented aspects of the military. Ambrose draws a surprising conclusion from this shift, "A virgin can be made to prostitute herself, but she can not be made to commit adultery. Wherever a virgin of God, there a temple of God. Brothels not only do not bring chastity in repute, chastity even does away with the disrepute of a place."[52] This story not only enacts virginity's complex relationship with the political but also presents the virgin as a solider who, fighting disrepute, brings forth sacred space of the *patria castitatis*.

Although Ambrose politicizes and, perhaps more boldly, militarizes the virgin, he also qualifies her political significance. The virgin does not rush out into the world but assumes a more the defensive stance. This can be seen throughout Ambrose's later literature in his portrayal of the Virgin Mary as *aula pudoris*, which has significant contributions for our thinking about sacred space. As Peter Brown defines:

> Mary was an *aula pudoris*, a royal hall of undamaged chastity. Any inhabitant of Milan knew
> what that meant. The Imperial palace was a building rendered perpetually sacred by the presence
> of the Emperor. No private citizen, at any time, could dare to occupy its silent, golden halls. The
> body of Mary, and that of each of her followers as consecrated virgins, was such a hall. An

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[51]*De virginibus* 2.4.24; Trans Ramsey: "*Et Judith se, ut adultero placeret, ornavit quae tamen quia hoc religione, non amore faciebat, nemo eam adulteram judicavit. Bene successit exemplum. Nam si illa quae se commisit religioni, et pudorem servavit et patriam; fortassis et nos servando religionem, servabimus etiam castitatem. Quod si Judith pudicitiam religioni praeferre voluisset, perdita patria, etiam pudicitiam perdidisset.*"

[52] *De virginibus* 2.4.26; Trans Ramsey: "*Christi virgo prostitui potest, adulterari non potest. Ubicumque virgo Dei est, templum Dei est: nec lupanaria infamant castitatem, sed castitas etiam loci abolet infamiam.*"

unbreakable "invisible frontier" lay between a virgin's body and the polluting "admixture" of the outside world.[53]

In order to unpack these political and spatial implications of *aula pudoris* for the virgin and the church, we will turn to Peter Brown's explication of the concept's wider significance and then turn to Ambrose's specific depiction of the Virgin Mary in *De virginibus.*

For Brown, the *aula pudoris* highlights three broader themes—Ambrose's concern about admixture, the financial conflict between *ecclesia* and *familia*, and paradoxical notions contained within virginity. Brown reminds us of Ambrose's desire to preserve the antithesis between the church and the formless confusion of the *saeculum*. In Ambrose's mind, the *saeculum* "was a voracious sea, whipped by demonic gusts, across which there now drifted, in times of peace, the Siren songs of sensuality, of concern for worldly advantage, and of readiness to compromise with the great-beguiling, female figures who threatened always to 'effeminate' the male resolve of the mind."[54] The *saeculum* represented all the dangers and disruptions of the age—whether threats of sexual impurity, imperial interference in the Church, or theological contamination of the Homoioans. The perpetual virginity of Mary as *aula pudoris* combated this fear of admixture. The closed body of Mary made concrete "the intangible screen that ringed the basilicas of the Catholic Church."[55] Her purity— and that of the consecrated virgin's— enfleshed a sharp line between the royal hall of the church and the swirling dangers of the *saeculum*, a line which no one would dare to violate.

Beyond preventing admixture, Mary as *aula pudoris* maps onto the *ecclesia/familia* conflict. At the time, no Roman or Christian would have had objections to their daughters remaining chaste through childhood, as Mary had done; but this was only so that they could be

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[53] Brown, *Body and Society*; p. 354

[54] Brown, *Body and Society*; p.348; Also see R.A. Markus *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine*

[55] Brown, *Body and Society*; p.355

given to their husbands as virgins. What was novel in Ambrose's exhortation of Mary was the permanence of withdrawal that fell upon the family. "To follow Mary, the *aula pudoris*," Brown explains, "was to adopt a state of perpetual, irrevocable virginity. It meant to withdraw the womb in perpetuity from childbirth, and not merely to control one's teen-age desires before marriage."[56] Among other things, the consecration of each virgin meant a portion of the family's wealth would be permanently frozen within the treasuries of the church. Though this generated tensions within families, it also had larger political effects. As every imperial palace was required to have treasure within, the virgin's brought some of the resources necessary to make the church into a truly royal hall, bolstering the church's position as an authoritative political body in addition to the existing imperial institutions.

Finally*, Aula pudoris* generated a series of paradoxes in its portrayal of the virgin and its view of the church's relation to society. In Ambrose's writing, the virgin's body was charged with many conflicting associations—static and dynamic, barren and fruitful, intact and exuberant. Brown notes "Precisely because the normal, sexual associations of a woman's fecundity had been renounced in them, the bodies of virgins were calculated to conjure up, in the mind of believers, all that was most 'untainted,' and so most unambiguously exuberant, in the notions of fertility, of continuity, and of creativity."[57] The closedness of the virgin's body allowed her to open her mind, heart, and hands to Christ, the Scriptures, and the poor. The virgin's body could only be open because of its closedness. This also extended to a thesis about the church's relation to the *saeculum*.

Brown highlights this connection well, detailing the ways in which virginal bodies created sacred space. He writes:

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[56] Brown, *Body and Society*; p.356
[57] Brown, *Body and Society*; p.363

> On a deep level, the preservation of the virgin bodies of Catholic women and the studied continence of Catholic clergymen echoed the cool, enclosed spaces of the Catholic basilicas. Along with the translucent marble surfaces and the shimmering golden vaults of Catholic shrines, the Catholic notion of virginity spoke of boundaries that no outsider, no heretical barbarian, would dare to breach…The praise of *integritas* enabled Ambrose to provide an 'invisible frontier' behind which the Roman populations of the post-Imperial West preserved their identity, long after the military frontiers of the Empire had been washed away by barbarian invasion and settlement.[58]

Brown skillfully elucidates how the virgin gets conflated with the sacred space and the political implications of this move. Virgins acted as nothing less than "human boundary-stones," with their presence distinguishing the basilica as a privileged and holy space.[59]

Within the cool and undefiled walls of basilicas— like the virgin's intact body— there was also the exuberance of transformation. For Ambrose, this energy could spill over and transform society as a whole. Brown describes, "Like a virgin, the Catholic Church was an intact body endowed with a miraculous capacity for growth and nurture. The long-lost solidarity of all humanity would be regained through the Church."[60] Implicit in Ambrose's imagery was the possibility of a Catholic world, where "the existing structures of Roman society might yet be bathed in the cool light of the Church, as it rose in the Empire, 'like a moon waxing in its brightness."[61] Mary as *aula pudoris* had grand implications for broader society. She drew a sharp boundary between the church and the admixture of the age, helped sequester the financial resources to make the church a truly royal hall, and illustrated how the closed walls of the church could transform the world. We will now turn attention to the portrayal of Mary in *De virginibus,* with these categories in mind.

Ambrose begins his description in a spatial register: "Let, then, the life of Mary delineate (*descripta*) virginity for you, set forth as it were in a portrait, from which, as if from a mirror, the

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[58] ibid
[59] Brown, *Body and Society*; p.356
[60] ibid
[61] Brown, *Body and Society*; p.364

outward shape (*species*) of chastity and the form (*forma*) of virtue will shine out."[62] From the

outset, Ambrose uses the language of portraiture and structuring to describe Mary's life. Like a

painter, he uses Mary to give shape to that which was once open and formless, to render chastity

and virtue intelligible. Ambrose continues in this register, adding a spatial component: "From

here (*hinc*), it is permitted that you draw patterns of life that show where (*ubi*), in the form of

examples, clear teachings on upright behavior, what you ought to correct, what to flee from,

what to hold on to."[63] Though difficult to render the interplay of *hinc* and *ubi* while maintaining

its spatial resonances, Ambrose's Latin reflects Mary not simply as a portrait but as a place or

location from which people may learn patterns of living, perhaps signifying something of a

basilica.

 Shortly after this initial description, Ambrose makes this spatial imagery more concrete

when he depicts Mary's body and virtue. He writes:

> Her bodily appearance (*species*) itself was the image of her soul and the shape (*figura*) of her
> virtuousness. A good house, indeed, ought to be recognizable from its very threshold and, when one
> first enters, it should be evident that no darkness lies hidden within. Thus our soul unencumbered
> by any bodily restraints should shine without like the light of a lamp placed within.[64]

Continuing the language of structuring, Ambrose compares Mary to a good house and locates her

virtue inside, that is, *intra domus*. Embodying the notion of the *aula pudoris*, Mary exemplifies

the manner in which the church is to avoid admixture with the formlessness of the *saeculum* and

maintain its purity and virtue inside. This becomes clearer in Ambrose's discussion of her

physical features: "Her gestures were not abrupt (*fractior*), her gait was not slack (*solutior*), her

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[62] *De virginibus* 2.2.6; trans Ramsey Modified: "Sit igitur vobis tamquam in imagine descripta virginitas vita
Mariae, de qua velut speculo refulgeat species castitatis et forma virtutis."
[63] *De virginibus* 2.2.6; trans Ramsey Modified: "Hinc sumatis licet exempla vivendi, ubi tamquam in
exemplari magisteria expressa probitatis, quid corrigere, quid effingere, quid tenere debeatis, ostendunt."
[64] *De virginibus* 2.2.7; trans Ramsey "... *ut ipsa corporis species simulacrum fuerit mentis, figura probitatis. Bona
quippe domus in ipso vestibulo debet agnosci, ac primo praetendat ingressu nihil intus latere tenebrarum; ut mens
nostra nullis repagulis corporalibus impedita, tamquam lucernae lux intus posita foris luceat.*"

voice was not pert (*petulantior*)."[65] These comparative adjectives stress Mary's intactness and emphasize that there is no room in her for admixture. As Ambrose continues, we see his desire to preserve the intactness and to keep the virtue of Mary and the church *intra domus*.

In an interesting passage, Ambrose develops the notion of *intra domus,* and highlights its significance for political tensions between church and family. He writes:

> Leaving her home was something unknown to her, except when she went to church, and that she did with her parents or kinsfolk. Toiling in the recesses of her home or pressed upon by the crowd in the marketplace, yet with no better guide than herself, dignified in her gait and countenance, with each step she took she grew in grace. Although a virgin may have others to look out for her body, she herself must look out for her own behavior.[66]

Ambrose describes the caution the virgin uses as she moves out of the house, paralleling the caution the church must exhibit in the *saeculum*. We also see Ambrose delicately balancing the virgin's relationship with her family. As was customary, the virgin would remain at home with her parents after her consecration, suggesting that she still belonged to some degree to her family. At the same time, Mary subverts the *paterfamilias*' total authority over the life and death of his household, as she has no better guard than herself. In the context of fourth century Milan, however, this move would have opened room for Ambrose to assert himself as surrogate *pater*.

Further on, Ambrose's description of Mary reveals something of the paradoxical notions in the *aula pudoris.* He narrates:

> At the very approach of the angel she was to be found at home, in seclusion, with no companions, lest anyone distract her attention, lest anyone disturb her, for she whose thoughts served as good companions did not desire female companions. Indeed she seemed to herself to be less alone, when she was alone, for how could she be alone in the presence of so many books, so many angels, and so many prophets?"[67]

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[65] *De virginibus* 2.2.6; trans Ramsey

[66] *De virginibus* 2.2.9; trans Ramsey: "*Prodire domo nescia, nisi cum ad Ecclesiam conveniret, et hoc ipsum cum parentibus, aut propinquis. Domestico operosa secreto, forensi stipata comitatu; nullo meliore tamen sui custode quam se ipsa.*"

[67] *De virginibus* 2.2.10; trans Ramsey: "*Talem hanc evangelista monstravit, talem angelus reperit, talem Spiritus sanctus elegit. ... Haec ad ipsos ingressus angeli inventa domi in penetralibus, sine comite, ne quis intentionem abrumperet, ne quis obstreperet; neque enim comites feminas desiderabat, quae bonas cogitationes comites habebat. Quin etiam tum sibi minus sola videbatur, cum sola esset. Nam quemadmodum sola, cui tot libri adessent; tot archangeli, tot prophetae?*"

Ambrose's portrayal of Mary depicts a paradoxical joining of solitude and company. Her closedness to earthly companions allows her to be open to wonders of the books, angels, and prophets. Mary, as a virgin within the house, models how the church fits within Roman society— isolated from the world, yet filled with wonders. Like Mary, the church was to "keep all these things in her heart."[68]

Looking back to Hunter, another significant result of Ambrose's spatial imagery is in how he took the qualities of the female virgin and applied them to the church as a whole. As Brown conveys: "The virgin state of the woman was hailed as a *norma integritatis*: it was both the pinnacle and the model of a state of sexual intactness that men, and especially members of the clergy, should strive to make their own."[69] The example of Mary was a measuring stick that was applied to the entire congregation. This was a surprising move, for Roman males were almost never expected to appropriate the virtues usually attributed to women. Adding to Hunter, then, the virgin not only had a distinct position in the church's hierarchies, she played a significant role in generating them.

In summary, Ambrose's spatial rhetoric on the virginity— the *patria castitatis* and *aula pudoris*— shows that the virgin had a profound role in shaping the 'social space' of fourth century Milan. Her distinct status within the church, modeled in the *velatio* ceremony, and the preservation of her intact body paralleled the church's position as a distinct space sectioned off from the polluting influences of the *saeculum*. Just as the virgin's barren womb could produce fruit, the inviolable walls of church contained room for growth and transformation, which would overflow to society as a whole. Before we move onto the church building in our current moment, it will be useful to return briefly to our overall methodological point.

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[68] *De virginibus* 2.2.13; reference to Luke 2:19
[69] Brown, *Body and Society*; p.359

As we have detailed above, Ambrose's spatial descriptions of the virgin contained prescriptive political proposals about the virgin's position in the church hierarchy and the church's role within society. If we take one step farther back, it is difficult not to hear the normative commitments ringing in the background of our descriptive approach to Ambrose. Of course, there is something deeply off-putting in Ambrose's latent misogyny and instrumentalization of virgins for his own political ends. Though we must be careful not to perpetuate this kind of thinking as objectively true or universally valid, our descriptive approach requires that we attempt to bracket our commitments to see the story through the eyes of our sources. In this respect, descriptive historical projects echo the sacred space of Ambrose's basilicas— only in their closedness can they truly be open to the phenomena they approach. The interplay of church building and politics and the tensions between descriptive and prescriptive projects can be seen 1500 years later in a particular strand of American Evangelicalism.

III. Theoretical Configurations of Space and Politics

As we step into the normative section of this project, it will be useful to spend a little time contextualizing my work with a touch of autobiography.[70] Throughout my time studying religion, I have participated in various evangelical groups around the University. My time in these groups has provided an interesting backdrop for my academic work and my academic work has been a useful way of reflecting on my involvement in these groups. One interesting point of comparison was the evangelical tendency to parade their prescriptions— proudly wearing their unwavering normative commitments on their sleeves— whereas academics usually hid these commitments or only let them surface under the weight of several disclaimers or apologies. As I

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[70] By normative, I do not mean to convey that I will be making normative proposals about the relationship between church and building. Rather, I will merely be using different thinkers' normative evaluations to describe different aspects of the space/politics relationship.

examine the manner in which prescriptions for the relationship of space and politics become useful tools of description, I hope to occasion reflection not only on the dynamics at play in a particular evangelical group's use of their church building, but also on how academics inhabit their own edifices.

In this section, I will develop more precisely how space—both in its conceptual and material dimensions— shapes a person's identity and politics in our present moment. The first half of this section will develop these themes through a mining of philosophical and theological resources, drawing out the theoretical and practical relationship between church space and politics. The second half of this section will use these resources to interpret the story of Flatirons Community Church, one of many non-denominational evangelical churches now hosting worship services in a converted commercial space. We will begin by developing the theoretical link between space and politics in the work of Martin Heidegger.

Beyond the obvious historical distance, Heidegger may seem a surprising, if not entirely ill fitting step in a project exploring church building. Despite his initial academic training in Catholic theology, Heidegger famously broke with the "system of Catholicism" in 1919, finding it "philosophically problematic and unacceptable."[71] Heidegger is also a difficult figure to treat politically given his open associations with National Socialism and public belief that democracy "could not accommodate itself to the technological age."[72] Although these complications are important for contextualizing Heidegger's work, his post war thought offers a helpful

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[71] Letter to Father Engelbert Krebs, 1919. Published in Ott, Hugo. *Martin Heidegger: A Political Life*. Hammersmith, London: Harper Collins, 1993; p.106. For more on Heidegger's complicated relationship with theology see Judith Wolfe's works*: Heidegger and Theology*. London: Bloomsbury, 2014 and *Heidegger's Eschatology: Theological Horizons in Martin Heidegger's Early Work*. Oxford, 2015

[72] Martin Heidegger, "Only God can Save Us: Der Spiegel's interview, with Martin Heidegger. Published in *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*. Cambridge MA 1993 MIT press; p.104. For more on his politics see, Ott, *Heidegger: A political Life;* Julian Young, *Heidegger, Philosophy, Nazism*; Miguel de Beistegui, *Heidegger and the Political*

philosophical foundation for the connection of the conceptual and material dimensions of space and for demonstrating the political implications of this connection.

Heidegger's essay "Building Dwelling Thinking," originally delivered in 1951 as part of a lecture series entitled '*Mensch und Raum*,' contains perhaps his most explicit articulation of space. A close reading of this short essay will clarify the ways in which building has ontological and political significance. I will go about this work by focusing on Heidegger's etymological interrogations of building and dwelling and by highlighting critiques of the essay, which illustrate the political dangers of his thought.

Like most of Heidegger's other work, the language of "Building Dwelling Thinking" is often difficult to pin down, operating on multiple levels and in multiple directions. One gets a glimpse of this in the translation of the German '*bauen*' as 'building,' which may function either as a participle or a noun. Throughout the essay it is difficult to parse out whether Heidegger uses 'building' to refer to a structure, an action, or both simultaneously. Though German can precisely disambiguate nouns and participles, the complexities remain within *bauen*. Depending on its context, *bauen* may be used as an infinitive, imperative, indicative, or conjunctive. Anytime the reader encounters *bauen*— whether in English or German— they are met with a range of conceptual possibilities that make it challenging to apprehend totally what Heidegger intends to convey. This postponing of a determined sense of *bauen* is a deliberate move meant to exemplify how the word locates the reader in a new conceptual space— a place that will gain both more depth and material significance as we move deeper into *bauen's* etymology.

Heidegger argues that we can come to know *bauen*'s essential meaning by listening to the silence of language. However, given a "proliferation of clever talking" and humankind's wrongly assumed "mastery over language," hearing is an arduous task that requires getting beneath the

noise of modern life.[73] Part of the difficulty is due to the way we grow accustomed to (*gewhonte*)

bauen's surface meanings of cultivating and constructing.[74] Although there is something

instructive in these surface meanings, the essential sense of the word is forgotten; it mysteriously

"falls into oblivion."[75] Heidegger presupposes that we can recover the essential sense of *bauen*

by tracing it back to its etymological origins. Unlike the more straightforward linguistic

approach—which traces a word's evolution through multiple authors, related languages, and

time periods, identifying semantic expansions or detachments— Heidegger traces a single

lineage of the word back to classical Greek. Here, we begin to see the existential significance of

building.

　　Bauen derives from the Old English and High German word *buan,* which denotes

something along the lines of lasting, preserving, and remaining. Citing the German *nachbar*

(neighbor), which contains a "covert trace" of the real meaning of *buan*, Heidegger asserts that

buan and its predecessors *buri, büren, beuren, beuron*, all signify dwelling, the abode, and the

place of dwelling.[76] On the surface, the linguistic link between building and dwelling draws in

aspects of materiality by emphasizing the home.[77] Building is not merely an abstract concept but

becomes associated with a particular place with all its physical and semantic idiosyncrasies.

More deeply, *bauen* indicates "*how far*" the nature of dwelling reaches: "*bauen, buan, bhu, and*

beo are our word *bin* in the versions: *ich bin,* I am, *du bist,* you are, the imperative form *bis*,

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[73]Heidegger, Martin. "Building Dwelling Thinking." *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Trans. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2013; p.144

[74] See Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," p.145. One surprising resonance with Ambrose is that one of Heidegger's primary examples of building as constructing is that of "temple-building." "Latin *colere, cultura*, and building as the raising of edifices, *aedificare*—are comprised within genuine building. We loose sight of this building precisely because of our almost liturgical motion through the day.

[75] Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," p.146

[76] Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," p.145

[77] For a thorough articulation of the material and philosophical dimensions of the home see: Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Trans. Maria Jolas, Mark Z. Danielewski and Richard Kearney. New York: Penguin, 2014.

be."[78] In its essential sense, *bauen* tells us where being happens. Heidegger extends the semantic force of building to an ontological level by suggesting that building is the home of being. In doing so, he introduces existential depth to building and material connotations for being. As Heidegger digs deeper into building, we get a clear picture of this materiality and a foretaste of the word's political force.

In one of the stranger moments in the text, Heidegger personifies *bauen,* narrating the word's response to perhaps the central question of his larger work:

> What then does *ich bin* mean? The old word *Bauen*, to which *bin* belongs, answers: "*ich bin, du bist* means: I dwell, you dwell. The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans *are* on the earth, is *Buan,* dwelling. To be a human being means to be on earth as a mortal. It means to dwell."[79]

Like an instructive parent, building speaks to us saying that 'to be' means 'to dwell,' and for humans this means to dwell as a mortal on earth. This 'on earth' picks up on a technical concept first developed in *Being and Time*. Growing out of his thinking on "being-in-the-world," Heidegger asserts that being and dwelling happen within a place and, for this reason, so does our thinking.[80] As Heidegger commentator Jeff Malpas describes, "Building is the productive activity through which human beings make a place for themselves in the world and so by means of which their own dwelling is articulated."[81] In other words, building is an activity through which humans create space for their being and for their thought. We need not dive too deeply into the nuances here beyond noticing that being and thinking happen in place, in building, and this involves aspects of materiality.

Bauen's response to the question of the meaning of being also illustrates something of the political character of building and dwelling. As much as Heidegger is constructing an abstract

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[78] Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," p.145
[79] Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," p.14
[80] I am drawing on Jeff Malpas' work *Heidegger's Topology*. Particularly Chapter 2 "Beginning in Place" and Chapter 4 "The Turning of Thought: Truth and World."
[81] Malpas, Jeff. *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2008; p.271

theory of thinking and being in place, he also specifically grounds his thinking in an 'I,' a 'you,'

and a 'we.' Following a familiar move of phenomenology, he simultaneously affirms some

degree of distinction between subjects and objects, but also undermines this distinction by

asserting that subjects and objects are wrapped up together in a single phenomenon.[82] As such,

building is not simply a productive human action, but also a larger phenomenon that sets the

stage for politics, albeit in an odd phenomenological key. If building involves an 'I,' 'you,' and

'we,' together *on earth,* then politics—by which I generally mean the structures that guide the

relations of people—seems to be one of the necessary consequences. Building interweaves

subjects and objects in place and lends itself to politics. The exact character of this politics will

become clearer as we examine Heidegger's treatment of dwelling.

One of the driving questions of "Building Dwelling Thinking" is how building belongs to

dwelling, German *wohnen.* The usual conception of this relationship is that building is merely a

means to achieve the end of dwelling, presupposing that building and dwelling are two separate

activities. Although Heidegger admits there is "some truth to this," he subverts the neat division

of the two by asserting "to build is in itself already to dwell."[83] Dwelling and building are

essentially related, which is to say that "1) building is really dwelling and 2) dwelling is the

manner in which mortals are on earth."[84] There is much to unpack here but we will focus on

dwelling as the mortals' participation in building—both in the sense of how mortals build and

how they exist within building.

Following the same etymological method as before, Heidegger attempts to go beneath the

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[82] For example, see Merleau Ponty's essay "What is Phenomenology?" Published in *The Merleau-Ponty Reader.* Ed. Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2007; p.55-68. "Phenomenology is a philosophy for which the world is 'already there' before reflection begins." Perception and embodiment are a starting point for clarifying the relation between the mind and the body, the objective world and the experienced world, especially as it involves language, history, and politics.
[83] Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," p.144
[84] Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," p.144

surface conception of *wohnen* as simply a remaining or staying in place. *Wohnen* derives from the Gothic *wunian*, meaning "to be at peace, to be brought to peace, to remain in peace."[85] Heidegger continues, "The word for peace, *Friede,* means the free, *das Frye,* and *fry* means: preserved from harm and danger, preserved from something, safeguarded. To free really means *to spare.*"[86] This surprising semantic nexus around dwelling reveals three related themes that illuminate something of the character of the phenomenological politics of building— openness, questionability, and boundary.

Close attention to Heidegger's notion of sparing will bring the meaning of openness to the surface. Normally, sparing is cast in negative terms as the preventing of harm, but here Heidegger claims sparing in a positive sense. To spare is to free— a freeing, which Malpas notes is closely akin to the freedom in 'On the Essence of Truth,' articulated as 'letting beings be.'[87] This 'letting be' is not a stoned disengagement but requires active attention and discipline, which Heidegger describes as a comportment of openness. To dwell, then, means to be open, creating space that lets beings be in their nature. As Malpas describes, dwelling is "that which opens up to allow room for what belongs within it…that which allows for, that which gives room, but also that which withdraws."[88] This leads us to our second theme.

In *wunian,* dwelling specifically means to allow *things* to remain in their questionability, freeing them in their indeterminateness. "The presencing of things," Malpas suggests, "is not a 'settling' or 'final determination' but the opening up of being in the unity of its multiple possibilities."[89] Things dialectically present themselves in their disclosedness and in their

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[85] Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," p.147
[86] Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," p.147. Emphasis added.
[87] Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology;* p.269
[88] Malpas, Jeffery. *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place: Explorations in the Topology of Being.* Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2012; p.19
[89] Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology;* p.250. For a good overview of Heidegger's development and use of the fourfold in his post war essays see Mitchell, Andrew J. *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger.* Evanston, IL:

concealment, in their finitude and their excess. To dwell means to preserve this tension and

movement in things. It means to preserve questionability. The failure of metaphysics is that it

promotes "specific questions that call for specific or determined answers— that which requires

explanation or resolution."[90] The questionability of dwelling makes space for things to remain in

their disclosedness and concealment, finitude and abundance. To appreciate this more fully we

must examine Heidegger's treatment of boundary.

Talk of boundaries often raises anxieties among many progressive thinkers, like Doreen

Massey, because of the way boundaries tend to promote and enforce single essential identities

while rejecting others that do not fit the norm.[91] Heidegger's sense of boundary recasts the notion

in a way that is more open and inclusive. He writes:

> A space (*raum*) is something that has been made room for, something that exists namely within a
> boundary, Greek *peras.* A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks
> recognized, the boundary is that from which something *begins its presencing.* That is why the
> concept is that of *horismos,* that is, the horizon, the boundary. Space is in essence that for which
> room has been made, that which is let into its bounds.[92]

Although a boundary still draws lines and allows the determination of things, it does so in the

service of making room, of drawing things into a horizon. Boundaries thus move toward "ideas

of opening and closing, of concealing and revealing, of focus and horizon, of finitude and

transcendence, of limit and possibility, of mutual relationality and co-constitution."[93] These types

of boundaries mark out the space of openness and questionability.

Northwestern UP, 2015. For a more precise development see Heidegger's essay "The Thing," in *Poetry, Language, Thought;* p.161-184

[90] Or the precise determination of where the limits of knowledge are (e.g. Kant's Noumena/Phenomena distinction)

[91] See for example Doreen Massey's critique of Heidegger in her essay 'Power-Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place,' published in *Mapping the Futures*, ed. Jon Bird. London Routledge, 1993; p. 64: "There are a number of distinct ways in which the notion of place which is derived from Heidegger is problematical. One is the idea that places have single essential identities. Another is the idea that the identity of place—the sense of place—is constructed out of an introverted, inward-looking history based on delving into the past for internalized origins… another problem with the conception of place which derives from Heidegger is that it seems to require the drawing of boundaries."

[92] Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," p.152

[93] Malpas, *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place*; p.2

Overall, the themes of openness, questionability, and boundary articulate Heidegger's conception of dwelling, that is, the ways in which mortals participate in building. In sketching out these themes, we have begun to see the character of the politics of building. However, it is still a very live question as to what type of politics these themes may be put in service of. Malpas suggests, "democracy itself is founded on a recognition of questionability and limit, and, understood in this way, democracy seems to be in accord with a Heideggerian topology."[94] A reader more attuned to Heidegger's political context may still have reservations about his thinking.

Heidegger's active involvement in the National Socialist party, though never secret, did not receive academic attention until Victor Farias' 1987 work, *Heidegger and Nazism*.[95] Since Farias' work, a plurality of political critiques, even outright condemnations of Heidegger's work, have surfaced— often finding a particular acuteness with the issues of space. As Malpas notes, "Heidegger's Nazi associations combined with the centrality of place— and the related notions of belonging, rootedness, homeland— are often taken as providing a self-evident demonstration of the politically reactionary and dangerous character of place based thinking."[96] Given the gravity of the situation, it is necessary to touch on methodological, stylistic, and content critiques of "Building Dwelling Thinking," that illustrate the potential dangers of a politics built out of space.

The methodological critiques focus on Heidegger's etymological prioritization and universalization of German. Neil Leach argues that Heidegger employs "a series of etymological

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[94] Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology;* p. 385 n. 212

[95] Farias, Victor. *Heidegger and Nazism*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple UP, 1987. Also see the introduction of Julian Young's work *Heidegger, Nazism, Philosophy* for a survey of different critiques and responses to Heidegger's involvement with national socialism.

[96] Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology*; p.17-8

strategies in his writing which attempt to lend authority to the German language by tracing the

origins of certain German words to ancient Greek."[97] J. Hillis Miller intensifies:

> [Heidegger] blithely draws universal, apodictic conclusions from the idiosyncrasies of a particular language or family of languages… If you can philosophize only in German or in ancient Greek, if the secrets of dwelling in the sense of the proper way to build, dwell, and think on earth are hidden in the now-withdrawn primal meanings of common German words, then a recovery of those primal meanings and building, dwelling, and thinking in their light would be not a local project but a universal one.[98]

The etymological bridge Heidegger draws between *bauen* and *buan* does not exist in English or

many other languages. If we can only come to understand the *essential* meaning of building

through German, this prioritizes and universalizes the language. We cannot fault Heidegger for

working from his particularity but we can fault him for universalizing it. The fear, then, is that at

the untranslatable heart of building is an unchallengeable German-centric ontology.

The stylistic critiques suggest that Heidegger promotes a nationalistic aesthetic in his

frequent and exclusive use of German symbols and images, and thereby "ascribes a spurious

transcendent validity to a local nationalist ideology."[99] In this short essay, Heidegger offers an

extended discussion of the Old Bridge in Heidelberg, praises the dwelling of a Black Forest

Farmhouse, and laments the postwar housing crisis largely caused by the bombings of the Allies.

We cannot blame Heidegger for drawing on the symbols and cultural context readily available to

him, but we must analyze whether these images encourage a dangerous nationalism or contain

subtle nostalgia for the National Socialist project.

The critiques focused on the specific theoretical proposals of Heidegger's work usually

connect building to the Nazi doctrine of *"Blut und Boden."* When Heidegger describes the

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[97] Leach, Neil. "The Dark Side of Domus: The Re-domestication of Central and Eastern Europe." *Architecture and Revolution: Contemporary Perspectives on Central and Eastern Europe*. London: Routledge, 1999; p.151-2

[98] Miller, J. Hillis. "Slipping, Vaulting, Crossing." *Topographies*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1995; p.252

[99] Miller, "Slipping Vaulting Crossing," p.253; For Examples of the Nationalist Aesthetic see Heidegger's descriptions of the bridge (Page), The farm house (Page) and Hölderlin's poem. "Heidelberg." *Agni* 63 published in *Humanities International Complete*., 2006; p.255-256. "I have loved you for long; will, just to please myself, Call you Mother, make you a gift of a guileless poem, You, of our cities, all I've Seen, most rurally beautiful."

presencing of a thing in space, he uses the word *versemmeln*, which connotes a forceful

gathering, rather than the more neutral *semmeln*. Miller argues that the forceful gathering of

things in space, which is often lost in translation, maps onto the violent imperialism of the Third

Reich, justified as the need for more *lebensraum*.[100] Miller continues that building authorizes a

monolithic, onefold, culture of a people (*volk*), sharing the same language, laws, and customs,

and dwelling in one particular place. "In that place" he writes, "their building has admitted or

installed a single unified landscape of hills, fields, and rivers, buildings, bridges, roads, and

horizons. Beyond that horizon no authentic culture may be conceived to exist."[101] Boundaries as

horizons are not more open if that horizon is determined as a solely German horizon. Miller

concludes that Heidegger's work could easily be used to authorize the doctrine of *Blut und*

Boden.

      The often-leveled critiques of Heidegger should not only give us pause in approaching

his works, but they also ought to give us pause on this specific point. For several years,

Heidegger was openly committed to the National Socialist project, which is inexcusable and

problematic. The political concern of these critiques illustrates that there is something powerfully

political at stake with building and dwelling and, in Heidegger's case, it may have been used for

terrible ends. It is still a live debate as to whether the ideas of "Building Dwelling Thinking"

naturally grow out of Nazi ideology or whether the ideology was read in after the fact. We must

avoid the temptation to commit the genetic fallacy or *ad hominem* attacks, but given Heidegger's

troubling political history, we must also ask how we can preserve the useful theoretical ground

without promoting his politics. J. Hillis Miller, one of Heidegger's most vocal critics, advises:

> The lesson to be learned from Heidegger is not that we should not read him, but that we should
> read him with extreme care and wariness, as though we were entering on dangerous ground. We

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[100] Miller, "Slipping, Vaulting, Crossing," p.253
[101] Miller, "Slipping, Vaulting, Crossing," p.253

should read him as the most persuasive and intellectually exigent expression of an interlocking complex of ideological assumptions from which no one can these days with certainty claim to be entirely free… The study of the way of rhetoric, tropes, and the materiality of language generate ideological mystifications may possibly, however, have a good political effect. By good effect, I mean conducing to a new form of democracy, a democracy of difference that puts the manifold in place of the onefold. It would do that by trying to show 'us' (another appeal to the solidarity of we) the political efficacy of the rhetorical, topological, and material aspects of our language.[102]

Although it is imperative to reject Heidegger's Nazi politics, Miller's lesson is that we cannot ignore the 'material aspects of our language,' both the dangers and possibilities of place-based politics. The task then is to proceed with caution, paying greater attention to the relationship between space and politics while cultivating a democratic response. For this, we will turn Luke Bretherton's recent work *Resurrecting Democracy*.

Up unto this point, we have remained to a large extent abstract, focused on the ways in which Heidegger provides a theoretical foundation for thinking about the relationship of politics and space. Bretherton's work is useful because it examines this relationship more concretely, exploring through a sustained engagement with broad based community organizing (BBCO) how a "place-based politics" is a necessary and powerful tool for democratic citizenship. Bretherton examines the spatial potential of politics on both a large scale and a small scale.

On a large scale, Bretherton begins by looking at the political landscape in its geographic and symbolic dimensions. "Buildings and institutions," he claims, "represent physical maps of political life… [they are] symbolic places both individually and collectively, representing as they do a history and nexus of power relations."[103] Within the 'geographic-symbolic' space of buildings, public relationships are formed and political life is conducted. This poses a theoretical and practical challenge for democratic politics. Its theory must include an account of the production of space "to explain accurately the conditions and possibilities of political action,"

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[102] Miller, "Slipping, Vaulting, Crossing," p.254. In his essay, "Thinking Topographically" Jeff Malpas also notes that "a democracy itself is founded on a recognition of questionability and limit, and, understood in this way, democracy seems to be in accord with a Heideggerian topology."

[103] Bretherton, Luke. *Resurrecting Democracy: Faith, Citizenship, and the Politics of a Common Life*. Cambridge UP, 2014; p.156

and its praxis has to engage in "remaking geography" if it is to alter the distribution of power.[104] In other words, since public life and political power are conducted in buildings, a democratic politics must address this space in its conceptual and material dimensions.

Bretherton offers an account of how BBCO navigates this large-scale terrain by 're-spatializing.' Where a nexus of power relations becomes too abstract to identify and thus more difficult to organize for or against, BBCO attempts to "respatialize" these relations by putting them in place and identifying their connection to building. The goal is to render power structures visible both to ordinary people and to those in power. Bretherton cites the example of the London Citizens use of Trafalgar Square in 2008 and 2009 for its "Strangers into Citizens" marches. As the people physically gathered in a politically and geographically central place, they manifested an expression of "people power," calling to account those in power. In such 'spatialized' demonstrations, Bretherton asserts "people can see and hear their relational power amid the disaggregating churn of the city and the isolating effects of state procedures and market processes on them."[105] With an interesting parallel to Ambrose's use of the *velatio* ceremony, people are able to challenge the powers at play "through ritualized ways of forming and taking control of public space."[106] In short, a place-based politics may make a large-scale impact by rendering the abstract nexus of power relations intelligible to those in power and those without power through the process of "re-spatializing."

Bretherton also highlights two small-scale possibilities for place-based politics. The first is what we may describe as 'mutual material interests.' Bretherton explains:

> Different faith traditions will have different overarching visions of the good life and often very different beliefs and practices; but simply by sharing the same mutual ground, they necessarily have a shared investment in the good of that place… These are interests they have in common; they are not selfish interests but mutual interests. And, while each may give different accounts of

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[104] Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy*; p.343n64
[105] Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy*; p.156
[106] Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy*; p.156

why law and order or public spaces are good, a common commitment to place can foster a common commitment to the people who live there despite their differences.[107]

Regardless of a plural community's different worldviews, they can unite for action based upon their common material concern for their neighborhood or city. People need not agree on a theology, cosmology, or a robust set of ethical principles to pick up trash at the local park or protest a nearby construction project that has harmful effects on the local ecology. A mutual concern for the material good of a place is a way to motivate common action.

Added to these material interests are sociologically oriented 'convivial interests.' Bretherton proposes, "If we are going to be sharing space with people, we have an interest in maintaining friendly relations with them."[108] A focus on place does not necessarily generate convivial interests, but it does provide a context and impetus for different people to get along, working together for a shared good. As Bretherton specifies, "a common commitment to place and people can foster a shared identity narrative by connecting each faith story to the story of the ongoing civic life in a particular place and develop a sense of mutual responsibility and commitment to the world around them."[109] Place does not necessarily provide an ethical narrative in the existentially formative sense as we find in a thinker like Hauerwas. If it did, we would run into many of the same dangers we saw in Heidegger. Instead, place merely provides a surface account of why people may, and already have, come together for common action.

Bretherton also helpfully specifies how these small-scale outcomes are often achieved. In the face of population churn and globalization— and perhaps a bit of millennial wanderlust— many communities struggle to generate and maintain a common commitment to a place because people do not stay in a place long enough to develop the mutual or convivial interests necessary

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[107] Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy*; p.95
[108] Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy*; p.95
[109] Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy*; p.95

to motivate action. In order to combat these trends, Bretherton identifies anchor institutions (such as religious institutions, schools, universities, workplaces, community centers, etc.) that can temporarily capture a mobile population and provide stability to community. The negotiation of a common life between such institutions, rather than between individuals who are increasingly on the move, allows for a place-based politics to emerge.[110] As various organizations stay rooted in place, they are positioned to generate more lasting mutual and convivial interests. This underscores the small-scale potential of place-based politics as well as the particular mechanics through which it may play out.

Although Bretherton helpfully identifies the usefulness of anchor institutions, he only briefly articulates the reach and effect of these anchor institutions. Catholic Social Ethicist Julie Rubio carves out a more precise space for anchor institutions in her work *Hope for Common Ground*. Rubio argues that the 'local level' is a "fundamentally important space for gathering people of different perspectives" together for the common good.[111] By local, Rubio generally refers to the 'space in between' the personal and political, including associations like neighborhoods, schools, community organizing groups, health care centers, businesses, charitable organizations, civic groups, unions, and churches. Though many of these organizations qualify as one of Bretherton's anchor institutions, Rubio most incisively explores the role of the church.

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[110] See Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy*; p.343 n 65 for his theological response to the dangers of localism and nationalism that we saw raised with Heidegger. Bretherton writes, "One way of moving beyond myopic, self limiting spatial frames is through a theological social/spatial imaginary in which the local is not absolutized or made an end in itself." A Christian cosmopolitanism works by the by locating particular places "within concentric circles of human sociality that culminate in an eschatological horizon of fulfillment. This horizon interrupts all attempts to make any place or scale of human interaction idolatrously self sufficient or totally encompassing in terms of economic, political, and social relationships."

[111] Rubio, Julie Hanlon. *Hope for Common Ground: Mediating the Personal and the Political in a Divided Church*. Washington, DC: Georgetown UP, 2016; p.xviii-xix

Rubio will help focus Heidegger's philosophical insights and Bretherton's practical considerations in the concrete context of the church, positioning us to draw further connections with Ambrose's construction of the basilica.[112] Like Ambrose, but in the key of contemporary social ethics, Rubio argues for the 'local' position of churches within society. Though Catholics "mirror society in that they are more divided now than at any point in their history," if they can learn to acknowledge and develop their 'common ground,' the church could offer "wisdom to public debates" and provide a model for the rest of society for dealing with our divisive times.[113] We will focus precisely on how the local position of the church allows it to offer insight where larger political programs fail and individual efforts fall short.

Rubio notes that top-down solutions are often less effective because they lack knowledge from below. This is the relatively banal point that large-scale solutions cannot attend to all the specificities and nuances of the problems local communities face. Rubio also makes a more interesting point about the patterns of logic ingrained in larger economic and political structures. Joining with Pope Benedict's call for the 'logic of gift' to find a place within political and economic activity, Rubio suggests that gratuity is necessary for the pursuit of the common good. However, due to the larger forces of capitalism and globalization, Rubio purports the logic of gratuity can only penetrate society from the bottom up, starting with individuals. For these individual efforts to make a broader impact on economic and political structures, they must mobilize through organizations. Because political programs often lack specific knowledge and the logic of gratuity and individual efforts do not reach far enough, they can only go partway to solving problems. By contrast, the church, nourished by the logic of gratuity and attuned to the

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[112] Throughout her work, Rubio leaves the church relatively under-determined. She is obviously engaged in Catholic discourses and speaking directly to parishes. At the same time she also inclusively engages many protestant thinkers. Thus, my use of the church here will focus on any Christian institutions that gathers together in a community, with theological and denominational lines laying outside the scope of this project.
[113] Rubio, *Hope for Common Ground;* p.xvi

problems of local communities, is positioned to personalize large-scale political programs.[114] It will also be useful to reflect on how the church's local position not only affects the political but also extends its reach to the personal.

One of the primary reasons that the local level is important is that most individuals do not have the privilege or opportunity to work for large-scale, systemic change. As Bretherton recognizes, "effective participation in the web of geographic-symbolic space requires knowledge of how to navigate the terrain: literally where to go, who to talk to, and how to undertake a public, political relationship… such knowledge is often limited to elites."[115] An effective ethic in general, and a Christian social ethic in particular, which wishes to have a transformative effect needs to enable better reflection on what each person— not just the wealthy and elite— should do in the spaces "where most of them move most of the time."[116] Since the church is rooted in the local, it is positioned to offer better prescriptions for how people should move in their everyday lives. This local position also enables the church to apply and organize this personal experience for larger political ends. For Rubio, the church is a space where individual improvements may be mobilized for greater political impact.

Expanding on the existential significance Heidegger accords to building, Rubio also calls attention to the personal formation that occurs in local places. She asserts that to be human means to be 'placed' and this very placedness forms the fabric of our everyday lives, structures our memories, and determines our attitudes. Rubio continues:

> Because 'place' is crucial to identity, acting 'in place' is acting in a fully human way, much more so than making an online donation to a nongovernmental organization. Local theology seeks to reclaim humanity from a mechanized system of powers. It is critical of universalizing tendencies and emphasizes that human beings are organisms, not machines, who by acting in their local

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[114] Rubio, *Hope for Common Ground*; p.69
[115] Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy*; p.156
[116] Rubio, *Hope for Common Ground*; p.63

environments, become very particular selves. According to some, it is primarily in local environments that human beings encounter reality and are transformed.[117]

In local environments, Rubio suggests that humans may resist the abstracting forces of globalization and may be formed in their particularity, finding themselves connected to issues once outside their sphere of concern. This personal formation occurs through practices shaped by the narrative of tradition and a particular local community (i.e. the church). The local community thus enables a type of individual transformation, which may extend to larger communal and political change. To appreciate the church's role in facilitating this 'local' formation we must examine Rubio's appropriation of Stanley Hauerwas.

In his early work *Vision and Virtue,* Hauerwas highlights the significance of vision in the formation of a person's character and ethical imagination. He writes:

> We are as we come to see, and as that seeing becomes enduring in our intentionality. We do not come to see however just by looking but by training our vision through metaphors and symbols that constitute our central convictions. How we come to see therefore is a function of how we come to be since our seeing necessarily is determined by how our basic images are embodied by the self–i.e. the character.[118]

For Hauerwas, the task is to learn how to accurately see the world, self, and others without illusion. We do not see with our eyes but with the self "formed by images that truthfully reflect the nature of our existence."[119] The images that form the self are acquired from a community, a point Hauerwas articulates through a comparison with language. He writes, "we learn our language in public context, but after doing so we may well give it a special meaning in terms of the uniqueness of our biographical development."[120] So too, we first learn to see through the

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[117] Rubio, *Hope for Common Ground*; p.71 This also resonates with Heidegger's critique of technological modernity, as that which removes all distance between people but prevents any sort of nearness. *Poetry, Language, Thought,* "The Thing" p.164

[118] Hauerwas, Stanley. *Vision and Virtue: Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection*. Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame, 1986; p.2

[119] Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue*; p.2

[120] Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue*; p.36

images and metaphors we are presented in community, then we may add our own individual coloring. As such, Hauerwas illustrates the role of church, as a community of people, in developing the personal transformation, which Rubio ascribes political significance to.

Despite Rubio's focus on 'place' and Hauerwas' initial emphasis on vision, both thinkers overlook the material dimensions of church, which can shape one's vision and politics—as we saw play out in Ambrose's use of the *velatio* ceremony. Just as the virgin's visual appearance signified her position in the congregation's hierarchy and gave Ambrose the political tools to mark the church off as a sacred space, so too the material influences the images, which may shape the modern individual and community. Matthew Engelke's recent ethnography of the British Foreign Bible Society, and specifically his analysis of ambient faith, adds another element to this story, exploring how materiality and 'the market' may influence vision.

Following the work of the Bible Advocacy Team— a specialized team within the Bible Society— Engelke traces how this group of actors went about creating the conditions of possibility for public encounters and engagements with the Word of God in a challenging set of alternate conditions (i.e. those established by the state, journalists, and pundits) which attempted to foreclose on this type of religious publicity. The Advocacy Team's use of 'ambient faith tactics'— introducing subtle references to 'faith' in the material background of a place— to alter these conditions highlights the 'sensory and social stakes' in long-standing debates about public and private religion.[121] One of Engelke's incisive examples is the Advocacy Team's initiative to provide the holiday decorations for an open-air mall in Swindon, England. The idea was to take

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[121] Engelke, *God's Agents*; p.40 Engelke sees himself adding the category of ambience to the debates about public and private religion: the interiorization of faith, often associated with the reformation (Asad, Keane, Taylor); the emergence and codification of the difference between politics and religion (Casanova, Gauchet); increasingly common recognition of religion (and now spirituality) as being about feelings and immaterial truths not subject to institutional arrangement or control (Bender, Heelas, Taylor). Engelke makes the case for ambience as a concept that can help us think through the issues each of these tradition raises.

the neutral commercial space and "open the spiritual door" by fixing angels to the top of the

mall's light posts.

The angels were meant to be physical sensory art, that is, "to have a material impact—to

demand, in their physicality, a sensory engagement with the shoppers of Swindon."[122] At the

same time, the angels were being put forth as indices of ambient faith, an unconscious and

ignorable invitation to "do spiritual."[123] These elements come together in Engelke description of

the angels:

> Like the sails on a ship, the angels could also convey a paradoxical mix of movement and
> groundedness. The whiteness of the angels was likewise motivated, being both meaningful and
> unmemorable. In a similar way, the genericness of the angels anthropocentric form – no marks on
> the bodies and no facial features—provide an open invitation to the onlooker to fill in the blank, to
> appropriate the object into one's own life or story. Or not. As objects, then, the angels were
> semiotic bundles of determined undeterminedness. As emplaced objects, they were meant to be
> ambient actors, yet again hard to pin down.[124]

By subtly changing the material environment, the Advocacy Team hoped to create an

atmosphere that encouraged biblical publicity. Altering the sensory environment was a way to

confuse the coherence of public-private divides, "challenging what the Society perceived to be

the normative understanding of the public-private distinction."[125] Engelke concludes that

ambience is not only a banal aspect of social life but an analytic tool with which we can make

sense of privacy and publicity. This is because the ambient qualities of a public are indispensible

in its constitution.[126] Engelke's emphasis on the influence of the sensory and material

background of a place foregrounds another element of this story— the influence of 'the market.'

A second initiative of the Advocacy Team was promoting a series of Bible studies in

pubs and coffee shops across England. This project marked an important shift from questions

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[122] Engelke, *God's Agents*; p.39
[123] Engelke, *God's Agents*; p.50
[124] Engelke, *God's Agents*; p.45
[125] Engelke, *God's Agents*; p.40
[126] Engelke, *God's Agents*; p.41; For another account of ambience generating publics see Hirschkind's articulation os "Sensory Envirnoments" in *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*. New York: Columbia UP, 2006.

about public religion focused on the realm of politics toward religion's manifestations in the marketplace. Participants in the initiative had to buy the right to subvert the public-private conception of religion, recognizing that coffee shops and pubs are public spaces only for paying customers. As Engelke puts it, "Bible society undercuts one normative public private contract (the religious one) by undertaking another (the commercial one)."[127] He continues, "These ambient campaigns are a metacomment on what we already know: that the market is mounting a major challenge to the subject-object distinction—yet another fractal at work. Ambience is a useful mediating concept in these various projects, a way of challenging the sufficiency or aptness of a fractal."[128] With attention to the material and sensory registers of the market, we can better understand and alter the structure of the public-private distinction. In short, Engelke's account highlights the sensory and material as mediums to affect personal formation and introduces the market as an important player. Both of these streams will converge in the story of Flatirons Church, but before we move on to this discussion it will be useful to summarize the theoretical ground we have covered.

By drawing out the theoretical connections between 'church space' and politics, we show both the dangers and possibilities of a place-based politics. In Heidegger's conflation of the conceptual and material, we see how his existentially significant description of building can landslide into a prescriptive political agenda. Bretherton identifies the spatial dynamics of democratic citizenship and recovers the democratic possibilities of a place-based politics. Taken together, Rubio and Hauerwas illustrate the significance of the church in this larger story and emphasize the importance of personal formation. Engelke drives home the sensory and material stakes in the formation of people and publics and demonstrates the unspoken influence of the

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[127] Engelke, *God's Agents*; p.59
[128] Engelke, *God's Agents*; p.63

market on these processes. With these resources in mind, we will now turn toward Flatirons Community Church.

IV. Mall in Church: Material Configurations of Space and Politics

Across the country, we are beginning to see the increasingly common phenomenon of evangelical churches making their home in converted commercial spaces. In my home state of Colorado, a slew of non-denominational, evangelically oriented churches have sought refuge in converted strip malls, causing mixed reactions of excitement and angst in local communities.[129] Despite their number and increasing influence in these communities and the evangelical world more broadly, few academics have given attention to the material dimensions of this situation. In this section, my aim is to elucidate some of the social and political effects of these churches new commercial homes and perhaps to fill in some of the gaps in the material history of American evangelicalism.[130] Given time and space constraints, I chose to focus my work on Flatirons Church, exploring both the church's material history and conceptualizations of the role of church building in community.

My reasons for focusing on Flatirons are twofold. First, on a more autobiographical note, Flatirons moved into its current building around the time I was in high school. Much like Ambrose's Basilica Ambrosiana did in fourth century Milan, Flatirons reconfigured the religious topography of the area where I grew up and caused many interesting political waves in the local

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[129] See, for example, Ascent Community Church (Louisville). http://www.ascentcc.org; Red Rocks Community Church (Lakewood campus). http://www.redrockschurch.com/locations/lakewood-campus; Foothills Community Church (Arvada) http://www.foothillsonline.org/

[130] Besides Anne Loveland and Otis B. Wheeler's work *From Meetinghouse to Megachurch: A Material and Cultural History*. Columbia, U of Missouri, 2003, I know of no other academic studies that focus on the material dimensions of American evangelicalism in general and the 'mall-church' phenomenon in particular. Some scholars, like Molly Worthen and David Hollinger, have devoted energy to the intellectual and historical contexts of evangelicalism in America but both skate over its material effects.

community. Though I do not explicitly reference it, my research is colored by my memories of this time and by the anecdotes of friends and neighbors, who regularly attended the church. Second, on a more general level, I focus on Flatirons because of its history of 'successfully' transforming commercial spaces into church spaces and the substantial material records it kept—including sermons, community videos, study questions, financial records, and news articles. Moving forward, I will begin by offering a brief material history of the group, focusing on the places it hosted church and describing their current location in a converted strip mall.

Flatirons Church is one of the fastest growing mega-churches in Colorado's front range. Originally founded in February of 1983 as the Trinity Bible Evangelical Free Church, it was the offspring of Calvary Bible Church in Boulder and Calvary Evangelical Free Church in Broomfield. For its first ten years the group had no permanent location, hosting public worship services wherever they could find space. After dancing between middle school cafeterias and high schools auditoriums scattered throughout the region, the church found a semi-permanent home in the University of Colorado Planetarium. During its time in the planetarium, the church merged with Boulder Creek Community Church and underwent a series of name changes before settling on its present title: Flatirons Community Church. With the newly solidified nomenclature, the church began to look for a more permanent space to host worship gatherings.

In 1999, Flatirons left the planetarium and its time of requesting spaces in various educational institutions behind, purchasing an old Carpet Store building in downtown Lafayette. Within a few years, the church outgrew its first commercial space and acquired a 45,000 square foot storefront in Plaza Lafayette, formerly a farm-and-feed store. After several years of steady growth, Flatirons again required a larger space. They considered two main options: developing a 27 acre plot of land at the edge of the city or moving across the road into a vacant strip mall

formerly comprised of a Wal-Mart and Albertsons. Through a series of lengthy public meetings, the City of Lafayette granted the church permission to purchase the mall and construction began immediately. In May of 2011, Flatirons moved its offices into the new location and shortly thereafter began to host worship services. As one newspaper reported, "where once customers dropped in on tubs of pretzels and packs of batteries into shopping carts, people can now drop in on the word of God."[131] Flatirons Church now draws a weekly crowd of over 17,000 to the small town of 28,000 people.[132]

After a $22 million renovation of the former big box stores, the162,000 square foot space now boasts many flashy features. Flatirons is home to an auditorium with a 4,000 person capacity, complete with a state of the art sound system comprised of 28 array speakers, 38 subwoofers; a six panel jumbo-tron measuring 40 feet by 22 feet; and more than 150 lights on stage complete with movers, hazers.[133] Outside the high-tech auditorium, in the middle of the church's massive concrete lobby, is a stand-alone ski lodge-style fireplace, numerous couches, and a coffee station. Where one might expect to see traditional religious iconography, the room hosts a full wall print of a muscular man's back, made from a compilation of photos of the congregation members' various tattoos. Branching out of the lobby are a series of 'hip' office spaces and brightly painted rooms, decorated in a sports theme. These rooms feature air hockey and ping pong tables, basketball hoops, foursquare courts, and a zip line, all of which cater to the 1,500 children who attend youth ministry programs each week.[134]

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[131] Aguilar, John. "Flatirons Community Church: Bringing the Faithful to Lafayette's Abandoned Big Boxes: Giant Church Fills Old Walmart and Albertsons Shopping Center." *Daily Camera* [Boulder] 9 Apr. 11. http://www.dailycamera.com/lafayette-news/ci_17804983?source=pkg

[132] "Flatirons Community Church by the Numbers." *Boulder Daily Camera*. 02 May 2015 http://www.dailycamera.com/lafayette-news/ci_28029794/flatirons-community-church-by-numbers

[133] Aguilar, John. "Bringing the Faithful to Lafayette's Abandoned Big Boxes" 9 Apr. 11.

[134] ibid

Beyond Flatirons' flashy, high-tech features, edgy décor, and sporty spaces, one will notice some important ambient features of the space. During the design phase, head pastor Jim Burgen and other church leaders made an intentional effort "to keep at the forefront the community's scars and imperfections."[135] For this reason, much of the building's interior remains unfinished, with raw concrete and ductwork exposed. As a newspaper article documenting the church's opening observes, "Sections of floor still bear the square imprints of Wal-Mart's linoleum flooring and, in other places, large cracks snake their way through the stone."[136] Burgen interestingly describes the theology behind these design choices. He comments, "There are cracks in the concrete because there are cracks in me. We're scuffed up. We're beat up people. This is a recycled building, and we're kind of recycled people… The last thing we wanted to do [was] build a brand new shiny building – because we're not all that shiny and new."[137] Hauerwas and Engelke provide helpful resources to interpret the forces at play here.

Recalling Hauerwas, it seems the cracks in the concrete, the unfinished décor, and vestiges of the previous businesses map out the Christian story of sinfulness and redemption, posing the question of how to live in the space between. In holding together the brand new with the old and unfinished, Flatirons' building reflects the Pauline struggle between the new self and the old self.[138] For Hauerwas, Christians must learn to see themselves and the world through this story and must be transformed in the process. Flatirons demonstrates the ways in which a building itself may articulate the narratives that form the individual.

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[135] ibid
[136] ibid
[137] ibid
[138] Ephesians 4:22-23; trans ESV: "You were instructed to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

Following Engelke, we should also note how Flatirons relies on the ambient features of its space. Similar to the determined indeterminateness of the angels in Swindon, Flatirons is known for its attempt to "make church not churchy."[139] It seeks to provide a place for those who feel ostracized by their 'overly religious,' high church upbringings. As teaching pastor Scott Nickell describes:

> We have a message that we want to deliver. So whatever will help us reach people, we will utilize. In a culture where a lot of people have had experiences where they've had religion, or the Bible, or Jesus kind of thrown at them— abrasively introduced to them— we just want to create an environment where people can say, 'Hey, just come and see.'[140]

Because of this emphasis, Flatirons does not directly appeal to the religious symbols, which people may find "abrasive" or "weird," such as crucifixes, icons, stained glass, or other material objects a 'higher-church' tradition may use to articulate its narratives. Instead, Flatirons relies on the ambient features of its building to tell its story in the more subtle background registers of the space.

Perhaps the most interesting implication of Flatirons' ambient story telling technique is in the way it translates Christian themes into the language of 'the market.' Within the building the old self is associated with economic neglect— the peeling linoleum and the unattended cracks in the concrete. The new self is reflected in the riches of a thriving economy— the top of the line audiovisual equipment, interior zip lines, and the rest. These market dynamics can also be seen in the building's wider location in the city.

At the time Flatirons purchased its building, the Wal-Mart and Albertsons had been out of business for several years, due to a lack of visibility from the nearby highway and a lack of foot traffic. It had come to represent a dead and abandoned part of the city. As Lafayette's

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[139] Wallace, Allicia. "With Rock Concert-like Services, Flatirons Aims Not to Be 'churchy'."*Lafeyette News*. Daily Camera, 2 May 2015.

[140] "How Flatirons Community Became The Largest Church In Colorado." Scott Nickell Interview by Ryan Walker. *Colorado Matters*. Colorado Public Radio, 5 May 2016.

planning director Phillip Patterson poetically describes, "[the area] had come to represent for the city a blighted wasteland, anchored for the better part of a decade by the skeletons of two big-box stores that had fallen into disrepair."[141] Patterson hoped that Flatirons' relocation to this area would revitalize this hard-hit area. It certainly did. A few months after moving to its new home, several national retailers opened stores in abandoned retail spaces adjacent to the new space. Flatirons injected a critical vitality into, perhaps even resurrected, the dead and abandoned part of town it was in.[142] Simply put, Flatirons chose to use the sensory registers of the market to tell its theological story, which not only had effects on individual believers but also on the market itself. The conflation of the theology and mercantile can also be seen in complaints with Flatiron's new business ventures.

Several newspapers articles detail the Lafayette community's unease with the church's entrance into the market. In an article titled, "The Spread of the Flatirons Gospel: expanding church causes unease in Lafayette," reporter Alicia Wallace describes the community's anxieties about the church and its expanding property holdings. Since acquiring the 'Walbertsons' property, Flatirons has purchased four nearby parcels related to the main campus. In 2015, Flatirons' real estate holdings had expanded to 45 acres in downtown Lafayette and are valued at more than $15 million, according to Boulder County property records. The major concern with the church's new role as landlord is that its increased market influence will allow it to impose its religious narrative as well. Unlike the Bible Society's coffee shop initiative, Flatirons was not buying a Cappuccino to get a seat at the table, it was buying the table itself. Harkening back to Ambrose's fourth century building program, Flatirons was using its resources to position itself within the wider culture. Both Ambrose and Flatirons sought to set the city's religious mood

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[141] Aguilar, John. "Bringing the Faithful to Lafayette's Abandoned Big Boxes" 9 Apr. 11.
[142] ibid

through building. The major difference is that Flatirons used building toward a model of cultural engagement, where Ambrose used basilicas to establish the sacrality and distinction of the church.

On the whole, this brief history and description of Flatirons' space illustrates both the personally formative aspects of building and how the ambient features of space extend to a thesis about the church's position in a larger public. Remembering the insights gained from Bourdieu in section I, the empirical aspects of the church are only half of the equation; we must also examine the naming and recognition of these aspects by an authorized agent. For this reason, we will investigate lead pastor Jim Burgen's sermons about place and church and the role these concepts figure into Flatirons' community.

Since moving into the new building, Burgen has delivered yearly sermon series addressing the church's core values or, as he likes to refer to them, "hills we will die on." The sixth of these values, titled 'Excellent Environments,' explicitly develops Flatirons' understanding of place and indirectly touches on the role of the church building in their community. Surveying Burgen's preaching on 'Excellent Environments' will demonstrate more clearly Flatirons' vision of the church as a site of cultural engagement. I will ground my work in two sermons, which most explicitly treat these themes.

In a sermon entitled, "Big Rocks: Excellent Environments," Burgen emphasizes a common evangelical saying, "church isn't a building; it's people." He develops this phrase working from a section of 1 Peter 2: "As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through

Jesus Christ."[143] For Burgen, the role of the church, as a collection of people, is to build and be

built into God's spiritual house. He exclaims, "God is building a spiritual building out of us,

living stones! This is not Jim's church; this is not your church. Not my church, not Scotts. This is

God's spiritual house. He just happens to be building it out of living stones like us."[144] The

church is not made up of bricks and mortar but of living and breathing people. Burgen delves

deeper into what being a living stone entails.

A living stone is a person who really understands what Jesus has done for them and in

response offers their time, talent, and treasure so that more people will have an opportunity to

"bump into Jesus." Burgen then expands this idea into his definition of an excellent environment.

He writes:

> An excellent environment is a place that is founded on the Bible (that is where we stand); It points
> everyone toward Jesus (you all work out your stuff); it opens up your arms wide to anybody that's
> looking for truth; its where every person in this community leverages whatever they have—their
> gifts, their time, their talent, their money – to create opportunities and to eliminate weird,
> *especially religious*, obstacles that get in the way so people can bump into Jesus, and decide for
> themselves if they can trust him or not. That's what you find yourself in today. That's what you're
> trying to build.[145]

Burgen both delineates an excellent environment and locates his listeners in that space. He

continues by disjoining the church from building: "[Flatirons] is not a special building, in a

special city, with a special booth, inside this special building, with a special person to talk to,

who allows you to encounter Jesus."[146] An excellent environment is not a building at all, yet it is

still a place with material implications.

Burgen draws on Romans 12 to highlight the material demands of making an excellent

environment. He exhorts:

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[143] 1 Peter 2:4-5, NRSV
[144] "Big Rocks: Excellent Environments." Jim Burgen. *Flatirons Community Church*, 25 May 2014.
http://flatironschurch.com/fi-messages/big-rocks-excellent-environments/
[145] ibid
[146] ibid

> Ok, living stones, we are going to rearrange our physical lives, and do things with our bodies and not do things with our bodies that we used to. Physical, relational, moral, lives all adjusted, different…Its not just physical adjustments, but also renewing our minds…Here, by the power of the Holy Spirit in your life, you are living stones, holy priests, commanded to build bridges to the world by rearranging and changing the way that you live your physical lives and to change your mind about the way that you see, judge, and value people, so that all people have a chance to come into my house and bump into my son. So he can save them.[147]

Creating an excellent environment, then, requires a personal material change. Like the angels in Swindon, this physical transformation is intended to index the spiritual, opening room for people to encounter Jesus and to be saved. This also resonates with Hauerwas and Rubio's notion of the church as a local site for both personal and communal transformation.

Burgen concludes his sermon: "So we're joining together with everybody in the room and everybody at Flatirons, other living stones, so not just people in this room, not just Lafayette, Denver, or Colorado but that the entire world might have an opportunity to bump into God's son.[148] Like Bretherton's London Citizens, here we see a group organizing at a local level, with an emphasis on place, hoping to make broader changes in the community and in the world. In contrast with London Citizens, Flatirons complicates the notion of "re-spatializing" by defining God's spiritual house as place, often passing over the material significance of their building. In short, an excellent environment is a site of personal transformation with material and spiritual consequences that is not directly connected to a physical building. The political implications of this vision of space will become clear as we turn to Burgen's second sermon.

In a sermon titled, "A Place to Ask, Seek, and Knock," Burgen draws on Matthew 7 to articulate different features of an excellent environment, which resonate with a Heideggerian topology. [149] He begins:

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[147] ibid

[148] ibid

[149] Matthew 7:7, NRSV: "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened."

> We believe that it is our role individually as followers of Jesus but also collectively in this place we call Flatirons… We believe that our role in the world is to remove obstacles—especially weird religious stuff that isn't in the bible and that doesn't belong here— and to create opportunities for people to bump into Jesus so that he can teach what only he can teach and do.[150]

Like Heidegger's conception of the open, an excellent environment makes room for people to experience the true, to encounter Jesus. It does so by removing the "weird religious stuff," which people often get "hung up on," and by calling for people "to get out of the way." Burgen continues, "People rarely trip over stuff God did and said. They trip over us, running into people who prevent them from asking, seeking, and knocking. As people in this place do we make room for people?"[151] An excellent environment is a place where people are let be, providing a space where people are given room to ask questions.

In an interesting parallel with Heideggerian questionability, Burgen claims, "What's true with families is also true with God and the environments where people come to find God. Everyone is allowed in, and all questions are let in."[152] Flatirons preserves questionability and the movement of disclosedness and concealment, of immanence and transcendence in their understanding of an excellent environment as a bridge or a gate. The space people come into on Sunday is a threshold; it is a context for questioning, not claiming to provide answers, or attempting to "shove things in your face." Flatirons seeks to be a place where people can ask, seek, and knock, a place where people may approach and be confronted by what is concealed, transcendent. Flatirons diverges from a Heideggerian questionability insofar as it promotes a teleology. At the end of day, Burgen claims one will find "answers from Jesus" not an interminable questionability that always leaves things to some degree undetermined.

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[150] "A Better Way: A Place to Ask, Seek, and Knock." Jim Burgen. *Flatirons Community Church*, 7 July 2013. http://flatironschurch.com/fi-messages/a-better-way-place-ask-seek-knock/
[151] ibid
[152] ibid

A final parallel between excellent environments and Heidegger's understanding of building is that both promote a complicatedly material and conceptual understanding of place. As we saw above, Burgen is quick to assert that church is not a physical building, but throughout his preaching he makes constant references to "this place" or the "place you find yourself in now." He often points to the material aspects of the worship service, whether it be the music or a piece of art in the lobby. When detailing the practical ways one can go about making an excellent environment, Burgen almost always addresses physical work that needs to happen at Flatirons' building: managing the parking lot, organizing the coffee stations, or cleaning up after the service. Like Heideggerian building, excellent environments are complicatedly conceptual places that also have material significance and material needs. Both Heidegger and Burgen highlight the existential significance of building. For Heidegger, it is to allow people to dwell; for Burgen, it is to allow people to be transformed by Jesus. Ultimately, Flatirons reflects a Heideggerian topology in three respects: a methodology of openness focused on 'letting beings be,' a degree of questionability, and conflation of the conceptual and material in an existentially significant space. With this in mind, we may now move toward a conclusion.

As I have hinted at above, Flatirons' physical building and Burgen's preaching on excellent environments promotes a model of cultural engagement. With its high-tech auditorium, relatable lobby, and lack of "weird religious symbols," Flatirons seeks to create an open space where people can bring their questions, take a breath, and unclench their fists. As Burgen asserts, "What you need is real people, defining and reflecting culture to communicate to people who were wounded by church… There is one world and one church and, for this reason, everything is fair game."[153] Flatirons uses every methodology available to bridge the gap between the church and society. We can come to see this political program by looking at Flatiron's prescriptions for

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[153] ibid

its space. On the methodological level, we have used certain prescriptive arrangements of space and politics to describe of Flatirons' conception of its church building. We will examine these dynamics in more depth as we turn toward the conclusion.

Conclusion

This project has explored two different instances of how political prescriptions may arise from seemingly neutral spaces. I have examined both the manner in which these spaces were constructed and the stances toward society they promoted. In fourth century Milan, Ambrose used virgins to construct the sacred space of the basilica, encouraging the church as an institution to remain detached from the contaminating influences of the *saeculum*. In Flatirons Church, we see a group of people working in the opposite direction, using their space as a means to foster a politics of engagement. Both stories show that church building, and space more generally, have a significant yet often under-examined effect on politics. To recycle Heideggerian terms, we may say that this project examines the ways that building shapes certain dimensions of human dwelling. We should also note that building and dwelling are inextricably connected to thinking. As such, building provides an important locus for exploring how modes of thinking may relate to each other and promote specific political programs.

Descriptive modes of inquiry reflect the sacred space of Ambrose's basilicas — only in their closedness and attempted separation from the *saeculum*, can they truly be open to the phenomena they approach. Prescriptive modes of reflection parallel the model of engagement embodied in Flatirons Church. They dive into the fray— open to different methodologies and attempting to speak something useful into our present moment. Despite their differences, Ambrose's basilica and Flatirons' 'Walbertsons' both work toward the same goal of facilitating a

space where people could encounter God. Alongside their dissimilar appearances and politics, there is an undeniable common ground between the two.

This project has been an attempt to explore this common ground by employing two types of methodologies, which are usually held in tension with one another. Bringing these two methods together is at times messy, complicated, and unclear but this conceptual space is important to explore because it begins to elucidate the methodological space between descriptive and prescriptive modes of inquiry. Both types of reflection have distinct advantages, both have irreconcilable points of tension, but the space between deserves an examination because of the politics it may promote. With all this said, we will end with the same questions with which we began: "Oh alright… so… what do you want to do with *that*?" Though I still do not have a 'good' answer, my hope is that this thesis has started to lay the foundations for such an answer by illuminating various tensions within the *'that'* and by considering new ways of inhabiting these tensions.