

MARCH 2015

## TRANSFIGURATION IN CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

BY ABE CHO

The idea of transforming or redeeming culture is often thought to be overly triumphalistic (or at least overly optimistic) about not only the ability to change culture but also about the actual lasting positive impact that a Christian's work can make on a larger culture. The realities of unintended consequences or misguided (albeit wholehearted) change efforts go unaccounted for, resulting in a naive equating of our understanding of and vision for an industry with God's renewing or restoring of that industry.

But admirable attempts to back away from the concept of transforming culture often lead to categories that seem overly passive. Charles Mathews seems to think the Augustinian category of "enduring" helps correct this problem. Christians are called to endure within the world as they approach the tasks of the world to be preparatory and formative for life in the New Creation. Hunter advocates for "faithful pres-

ence" which seems to get closer (for presence can be understood actively).

I am interested in exploring the possibility of the theological category of "transfiguration" as an angle into how we are called to engage with cul-

### Center for FAITH & WORK

ture. What would it be like if we started to talk about seeing a *transfiguration* of culture, rather than a transformation of it?

Transfiguration allows for the decisiveness of God's final work. It does not have the finality of the language of "transformation." There is something tentative, even fragile about this metaphor that more accurately captures the work of the hands of creatures. And yet, there is something eternally and enduringly glorious about it as well.

Transfiguration allows for the "already" of God's work. Transfiguration is more a pull-

ing back of the curtain of reality to reveal what is already the case, whereas transformation would imply that something new must be established or created. The work of Christians rightly done merely reveals or uncovers the "already work" of the Holy Spirit in both creation and redemption.

Transfiguration begins with "redeemed seeing."

As such, transfiguration effects a change in the *believer* first before it seeks to effect a change in an industry. Transfiguration requires the ability to see with new eyes, to see reality as it truly is from the vantage point of the work of God the Father in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. This new seeing, this new vision of reality requires constant cultivation and attentiveness in the spiritual life of the believer. It requires a renewed imagination about what is already true and therefore about what is now possible in the Spirit.

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# 2015 HOLY WEEK SCHEDULE

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## **Wednesday, April 1, 7 p.m. | The Gospel of Mark presented by Max McLean**

W83 Ministry Center, 150 W. 83rd St.

## **Thursday, April 2, 6:30 p.m. | Maundy Thursday**

The Salvation Army, 120 W. 14th St.

Maundy Thursday is a celebration of the events at the Last Supper. There will be a worship service and an optional communal meal afterwards. RSVP to attend the communal meal as space is limited (meal is optional and costs \$10.00 per person, pay when you register: [redeemer.com/maundy](http://redeemer.com/maundy))

## **Friday, April 3, noon to 3 p.m. | Open Prayer in Sanctuary**

W83 Ministry Center, 150 W. 83rd St.

The afternoon of Good Friday the W83 sanctuary will be open for quiet prayer and reflection. Prayer guides will be available and musicians will be present providing accompanying music.

## **Friday, April 3 | Good Friday Services**

### **East Side, 5:30 p.m. & 7 p.m.**

All Souls Unitarian Church, 1157 Lexington Ave.

Childcare through age four. **RSVP required**, please email [stephanie.weatherly@redeemer.com](mailto:stephanie.weatherly@redeemer.com) with your service preference and age of child(ren).

### **West Side, 5:00 p.m. & 7:00 p.m.**

W83 Ministry Center, 150 W. 83rd St.

Childcare through age 4.

## **Sunday, April 5 | Easter Sunday Services**

The annual Easter Sacrificial Offering for Hope for New York (HFNY), our mercy and justice outreach to the city, will be received at all services Easter Sunday. HFNY provides volunteer and financial resources to 40+ non-profit organizations serving the poor and marginalized in NYC. Learn more at [hfny.org/easter](http://hfny.org/easter)

### **East Side, 9:45 a.m.\*, 11:30 a.m. & 6:00 p.m.**

All Souls Unitarian Church, 1157 Lexington Ave.

### **West Side, 8:30 a.m.\*, 10:00 a.m., 11:30 a.m., 5:00 p.m. & 6:45 p.m.**

W83 Ministry Center, 150 W. 83rd St.

### **Downtown, 9:30 a.m.\* & 5:00 p.m.**

The Salvation Army, 120 W. 14th St.

\* Even with additional Easter Sunday services, we anticipate that most if not all morning services will reach or exceed capacity. If you can, please consider attending the first morning service at one of our sites or any of our evening services, where we expect to have more space available.

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## REDEEMER REPORT

The Redeemer Report is a publication of the Redeemer Presbyterian Church.

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Kathy Keller

Heather Klein

Hunter College Auditorium  
E. 69th St.

(between Park & Lexington)

Services: 10:30 a.m. & 6 p.m.

W83rd Ministry Center  
150 W. 83rd St.

(between Columbus & Amsterdam)

Services: 9:30/11:30 a.m., 5 & 7 p.m.

Salvation Army Auditorium  
120 W. 14th St.

(between 6th & 7th Aves.)

Services: 9:30 a.m. & 5 p.m.

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# COMMIT TO GENEROSITY THROUGH THE HOPE EXCHANGE

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Launched in 2013, The Hope Exchange is a community of New Yorkers who build generosity into their daily lives and make a difference for the poor and marginalized through small, monthly gifts.

More than 200 members have joined, and our community is continuing to grow! Below, some Redeemerites share why they've decided to commit to being generous to the poor of our city.

“When I was still in college, I heard Tim Keller say that if we all actually gave 10%, it would “float all the boats,” i.e. all good causes whether churches or nonprofits would be funded; and that if we scheduled our giving we would give more, and we wouldn't even feel it because it becomes automatic, like a 401k. It was so persuasive that I decided to give on a recurring basis to any cause I care about, and that I actually know is making a difference. Hope for New York is one that I know keeps a lot of grassroots ministries afloat and serves a lot of vulnerable New Yorkers. And I know it because I've experienced it!” —*Clara Lee*

“I love being able to give monthly support to an organization like HFNY that supports amazing programs serving our city, and that gives me the chance to volunteer and serve alongside them as well.” —*Nathan Vickery*

“I asked myself, “Where could I give up one personal delight a month to support God's work in one of the many ministries HFNY supports?” The comparison was practical and the goal was very tangible for me. I was excited about the difference I could make with this monthly commitment over time.” —*Daniela Lee*

“My hope for the city is that we can equip those less fortunate with the tools and opportunities necessary to find jobs, provide for their families, and become role models to others around them. I gave up a nice dinner once a month to help make this happen.” —*Blake Deboer*

“I give because we're called to seek the peace and prosperity of the city. I cook at home a few nights each week so that children can achieve academically.” —*Erin Ax*

“I joined the Hope Exchange because like the name suggests, I have the opportunity to provide hope for someone, whether it is food through soup kitchens and food pantries, counseling for the homeless, educational materials and mentoring for youth, job-skills training for immigrants, or other great ways that Hope for New York provides for the city. I exchange this hope through the small gift I make come from giving up a cup of coffee and a dinner out.” —*John Vincent Hilario*

If you'd like to join these Redeemerites in committing to generosity to the poor throughout the year, find out more at [hfny.org/hopeexchange](http://hfny.org/hopeexchange). We're hoping to add 200 more members by the end of the month!



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## TRANSFIGURATION ... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 1)

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Transfiguration allows for mystery. While a transfiguration is a revelation, it is also at the same time a mystery because what is revealed goes beyond the comprehension of the creaturely mind. Peter's response was to build a memorial, not because he misunderstood Jesus' transfiguration, but because he failed to understand it in its fullness. Transformation suggests that Christians know what the good is. Transfiguration creates room for a not knowing, a mystery, an incomprehensibility that transcends the understanding of the person who seeks it. And therefore, it creates an appropriate humility in the believer because the vision of transfiguration always eludes us at a deep and fundamental level.

A definition of the Greek word (*metamorphao*) can be translated as "transfiguration": "Of the transformation of raw material into a statue." This, I

think, captures the essence of what we mean by transfiguration. It reminds me of the famous quote often attributed to Michaelangelo "Every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it." The artist sees that block transfigured. The curtain of reality is pulled back in the vision and imagination of the sculptor, and he sees the fuller reality that is already present in the ordinary — we only need eyes to see it.

It is remarkable that it is this word that Paul uses in 2 Corinthians 3:18 to refer to those who believe: "And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed (transfigured!) into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." In this context the connection is even more remarkable because Paul is talking about the giving of the law and the glowing face

of Moses, which is clearly the background in the passage of Jesus' transfiguration. We are being transfigured! And the statue (image!!) that is inside the block of our ordinary, frustrating, simple, sinful, glorious lives is Christ himself. As Christ was transfigured, so are we.

When we apply this astonishing insight into how we are to see God's creation, we begin to see that transfiguration is an important way to think about cultural engagement. In transfiguration, the veil is removed on reality, the curtain is pulled back and we see the blazing glory of God's creation — the statue inside the block. And we can see that for every industry in which we are engaged. We can see our work transfigured before our eyes and we can begin to work choosing not to see the ordinary reality, but ordinary reality transfigured by the presence of God in that work.