

Marotta shows that when we pray the Lord's Prayer, we shift spiritual tectonic plates that lie deep beneath culture, society, and the depths of our own hearts. This book awakens our hearts to the beauty and bounty of the Lord's Prayer, helping us to live faithfully in the wilderness.

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CHAPTER 1

THE NEED FOR SUBVERSIVE IMAGINATION

Beauty is subversive. Why? Because it is powerful. It is powerful because it makes us dream. It makes us think. It makes us imagine a world that is bigger than the one we know and one that's worth taking a risk for. Even in a brutal world, beauty exists and its power leads us to faith, hope, and love.

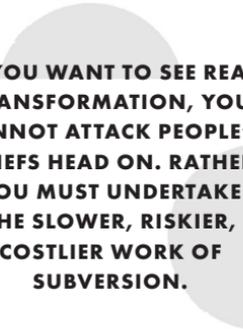
-MICHAEL FRYER

Dr. Pat Brown was not interested in starting a business. As a tenured professor of biochemistry at Stanford University, Pat already had his dream job. But there was something that had bothered him for decades. As a committed vegan, he had long considered the use of animals for food to be the world's greatest environmental problem. So, when he took a sabbatical in 2009,

he decided to dedicate the rest of his life to doing something about it.

First, he did the expected thing and organized a conference to raise awareness of the problem. He hosted a National Research Council workshop titled “The Role of Animal Agriculture in a Sustainable 21st Century Global Food System.” Not surprisingly, hardly anyone attended. Pat realized that if he wanted to fundamentally change what foods people ate, he was going to have to do more than cite facts and demand change; he was going to have to create a vegetable product that actually *tasted* as good as meat. He realized the path to the change he wanted to see was not through debate or politics or education, it was through *taste*.

All the facts in the world don’t move the needle on public policy; what you have to do is something more subversive. You can’t persuade people by education or nagging to change their diet significantly . . . look at how well people follow nutrition recommendations for their own health as opposed to the good of the world! . . . Public policy doesn’t work, education doesn’t work—you need a more subversive solution.¹



IF YOU WANT TO SEE REAL TRANSFORMATION, YOU CANNOT ATTACK PEOPLE’S BELIEFS HEAD ON. RATHER, YOU MUST UNDERTAKE THE SLOWER, RISKIER, COSTLIER WORK OF SUBVERSION.

Pat went on to found Impossible Foods Inc., and in 2016, his “burgers” appeared on menus in restaurants across the country.

Now, your feelings on food ethics aside (I personally enjoy pit-smoked Texas-style brisket, please and thank you) the point of the story is that if you

want to see real transformation, you cannot attack people's beliefs head on. Rather, you must undertake the slower, riskier, and costlier (but in the long run, more effective) work of subversion.

This is the change in posture that wilderness Christians must adopt in the twenty-first century. What ought to be the posture of the people of God when they no longer wield cultural power and have become a marginalized fringe group? There are three normal responses to which many of us default, and the purpose of this book is to propose a fourth and better way forward.

THREE NORMATIVE POSTURES²

Defensive: In this “shield” posture, an individual Christian, church congregation, or network of churches rightly perceives the potentially corrupting influence of secular neighbors and culture, but wrongly responds out of fear, retreating and insulating themselves from those neighbors and culture.

Passive: In this “white flag” posture, an individual Christian, church congregation, or network of churches rightly perceives the intimidating power and force of secular neighbors and culture, but—due to either disinterest or a sense of helplessness—wrongly responds to such force with apathy or surrender.

Aggressive: In this “sword” posture, an individual Christian, church congregation, or network of churches rightly perceives the threat of secular neighbors and

LITURGY IN THE WILDERNESS

culture to the open practice of Christian faith, but, in anger, wrongly responds with a threat of its own.

Though this is bordering on gross oversimplification, experience bears out that most Christians in Western society fall somewhere in these three basic postures. They either:

1. Feel fearful and want ways to protect themselves and those they love
2. Feel helpless and just go with the flow
3. Feel angry want to take what they feel is rightfully theirs

Of course, there are exceptions, and my guess is that, in reading this, you are not satisfied with these categories.

Good. Neither am I. Let's find a better one.

THE FOURTH WAY IS SUBVERSIVE

Now, if you are a Christian, you might feel the word subversive is inherently negative. It may bring up images of Cold War-era spies or terrorist cell groups. However, at least for the purposes of this book, I'd like to posit that subversion is simply a non-direct way of undermining a system in order to establish something different in its place. Subversion is not a retreat to safety, nor is it peace, nor is it attack; it is a different way of engaging altogether.

- When the United States puts a Starbucks in the Forbidden City in Beijing, that is subversion.
- When Hollywood puts out yet another movie where the Christian character is an idiot, that is subversion.

- When football player Colin Kaepernick kneels during the national anthem, that is subversion.
- If you'd prefer a less controversial example: when a mother says to her child, "Let's pretend we're dinosaurs and eat this broccoli together!" that is subversion.

Consider how each of these is a non-direct way of accomplishing a purpose.

The US doesn't argue for capitalism in China, it just offers fast, convenient coffee.

Hollywood doesn't say "God does not exist," it just makes people who hold that belief look dumb.

Colin Kaepernick doesn't run for political office; he sparks a national conversation.

The creative mother doesn't detail the nutritional information of broccoli, she uses the child's love of play to hijack their resistance to vegetables.

Subversion.

The Most Powerful Method of Transformation

There is no method of transformation—whether for something as small as a personal habit or as large as an empire—more powerful than subversion. Consider these examples . . .

In 1882, Jigoro Kano invented the physical and moral pedagogy that we now call the martial art of judo, which means "the gentle way." Isn't it interesting to name a method of combat "gentle"? Kano explains:

In short, resisting a more powerful opponent will result in your defeat, whilst adjusting to and evading your

opponent's attack will cause him to lose his balance, his power will be reduced, and you will defeat him. This can apply whatever the relative values of power, thus making it possible for weaker opponents to beat significantly stronger ones.³

A judo master is one who can fluidly turn her opponent's attack against him. She doesn't block his punch; she grabs his wrist and pulls him forward *as* he punches, using his punch to throw him off balance. She doesn't attack her opponent to win, she wins by subverting his attack.

**CHRIST DYING ON THE
CROSS WAS THE MOST
MASTERFUL ACT OF
SUBVERSIVE COMBAT.**

We might say that Christ dying on the cross was the most masterful act of subversive combat: Satan attacks God to put Him to death. God fluidly uses

that attack to overthrow both Satan and death in a single move.

Here's a less violent way of thinking about it: How does every romantic comedy begin? We meet a character who, for some reason, has sworn off dating. What happens next? He comes face-to-face with a woman who is just perfect for him, and we (the audience) know that he will (after much angst) end up with her in the end.

Now, let's ruin this "meet cute" moment with in-depth analysis. What, exactly, is going on when the character who has sworn off dating meets the person they're going to end up with?

- Have their convictions about the evils of dating changed?

- Have their beliefs about the virtues of the single life changed?
- Speaking of change, has anything about them changed at all?

No. Absolutely nothing has changed inside of them. So, what happened to cause the change?

Beauty happened.

It may have come in the form of a stunning supermodel or in the form of an adorably bumbling nerd, but something *arresting* happened, and it subverted all their supposed convictions and beliefs. This is the subversive power of beauty:

Moments of beauty—be it music, art, nature, or an act of kindness—can take you out of a space of weary familiarity. Beauty, in whatever form it takes, can interrupt a pattern of behavior or a way of thinking and cause us to stop in our tracks and take notice of it.⁴

When beauty meets belief, beauty wins every time. Why? Because belief attempts to persuade your mind with data and doctrine while beauty skips past your brain and goes right to your heart, your gut, and your instincts.

THE SUBVERSIVE WAY OF JESUS

The gospel of Jesus set forth in the Bible is also subversive, though we may not be accustomed to thinking of it that way. When God took on human flesh in the person of Jesus, entered our world as a baby, lived the life that we could not live, died the death we deserve to die, rose to new life as a guarantee of our future

resurrection, ascended to heaven to reign on the throne, and sent His Spirit to dwell in our hearts, that was subversion. How so? If we take the apostle Paul's words in Romans 5 and 8 and the pain and suffering of our world seriously, then we must admit that humanity has made itself an enemy of God. So, what kind of posture does God take toward a hostile world?

- Defensive? Retreating to heaven and barring the gates to keep wicked humans out?
- Passive? Blithely watching our downfall and shrugging it off as our problem, not His?
- Aggressive? Reconquering the world by force?

Each of these postures occur on some level in the biblical story. God does *defensively* maintain the purity of heaven in His divine presence, and sinful humans enter it at their peril, as the prophet Isaiah experienced when he found himself drawn into

the throne room and cried out, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips."⁵ God does—in seeming *passivity* for a season—allow us and the world to go our own way. As the psalmist writes, "Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord? Rouse yourself!"⁶ God does, at times, *aggressively* use force, as Pharaoh discovered in Exodus

WE MUST ADMIT THAT HUMANITY HAS MADE ITSELF AN ENEMY OF GOD. SO, WHAT KIND OF POSTURE DOES GOD TAKE TOWARD A HOSTILE WORLD?

chapters 7 through 14. But, while God does adopt these postures in limited ways for limited periods of time, His primary posture toward hostile humanity is benevolently subversive. God does

not fundamentally defend from, ignore, or attack His enemies; He loves them and, at the cross, dies for them. Why? To win former enemies over to Himself that He might dwell with them in peace. The good news of the gospel is inherently subversive in nature.

Subversive Stories

Not only did Jesus embody God's subversive love, but Jesus also told subversive stories. Have you ever wondered why the parables of Christ are *still* so effective after all this time? It is because these ingenious little stories have a way of burrowing into our brains and slowly transforming us from the inside as the meaning gradually dawns on us.

For example, take Jesus' parable of the great banquet in Luke 14. Jesus is reclining at a table with Pharisees and other spiritual heavyweights. Things must have been going well because one of them says, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!"⁷ Though the language is strange to our ears, this is exactly the sort of thing you or I might say if we had the chance to share a meal with Jesus in our lifetime. The man is having a grand time. He's essentially saying, "This meal we're sharing together with You, Jesus, is a taste of heaven!"

And Jesus, in response, tells a story about a man who gives a great banquet and invites his friends. His friends make excuses and don't show up. So, the master sends servants to instead invite the poor, crippled, blind, and lame, and then to go out to the highways and hedges and bring everyone in so that his house will be filled for the party. The story harshly concludes with the master declaring that the original invitees will never enjoy the

banquet. What has Jesus just done? He's told a story that has obvious internal consistency, but that doesn't appear at first to have anything to do with what the excitable man has just said. However, upon closer examination, you realize that the story actually has *everything* to do with the man's enthusiastic statement. Jesus is saying, Yes. Blessed are those who eat bread in the kingdom of God, *but those people are not who you think they are*. They are not those religious elites who think they're on the invite list; they are the outcasts and strangers whom no one would expect to see at the banquet table.

How is this subversive? The truthfulness of a parable is self-evident. It's only later that you realize it applies to you and requires you to change; but by then it's too late! You already believe it! Now you are faced with the uncomfortable, but potentially transformative, reality that you believe something that is obviously true and yet does not jive with your current life. Congratulations. Thou hast been subverted.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

And so, when Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them to pray and He gave them a handful of words to pray that summarize the entirety of what it means to be His follower, that was subversion.

The Lord's Prayer is inherently subversive, for at least three reasons:

It is liturgical.

At first blush, praying a liturgy can feel like an exercise in the worst of rote, ritualistic religiosity (try saying that three times

quickly!). *Making my mouth say the sounds doesn't mean that my heart is alive to God.* Quite right. But have you considered that all our relationships begin with learning to repeat other people's words? We teach our infants to relate to their parents by saying "Mama" and "Dada." When a beaming new father leans over the crib and whispers, "Can you say Dada?" he is essentially doing the same thing as a newly baptized Christian learning to say, "Our Father." Liturgy establishes relationship non-directly, subversively.

I serve as a priest in an Anglican church. When our congregation gathers for worship, I don't begin the service with a long lecture on how we are all one, united church family; rather, we simply begin praying liturgically together. No doubt many of us are entering the room feeling somewhat disconnected, both from God and from each other. But if we are willing to move our mouths and pray the liturgy in unison—trusting the Holy Spirit to work—then we often find that somewhere along the way our hearts have genuinely and authentically come alive both to God and to each other.

If liturgical prayer in a church worship service is strange and foreign to you, think about it this way: Why do great crowds of people love singing together at concerts? Why do wild throngs of fans love to chant together at major sports games? Is it because we all showed up with equally high levels of loyalty for the band or team? Absolutely not. I bet there are a lot of lukewarm first-timers in the stands. But if there is a vibrant, powerful singing/chanting/shouting-in-unison aspect to the concert or game, then we first-timers are going to find ourselves *loving* that band or team. Why? Because the communal liturgy subversively shapes

**COMMUNAL LITURGY
SUBVERSIVELY SHAPES
OUR AFFECTIONS BY
SWEEPING US UP IN A
POWERFUL EXPERIENCE.**

our affections by sweeping us up in a powerful experience.

The Lord's Prayer works on the same principle. It subversively shapes our affections because it is a liturgical prayer.

It is deceptively short and simple.

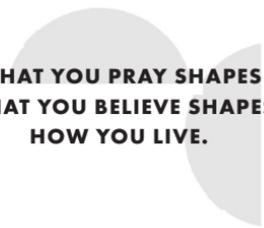
No doubt the disciples expected Jesus to give them a complex, long-winded dissertation on the nature of prayer and the proper forms and rules of prayer. He gave them none of that. Rather, He gave them a simple framework that is still recited two thousand years later. The simplicity and brevity of the Lord's Prayer is part of the subversion. We hear it and think, "This seems easy enough." We may even be tempted to think it so short and simple that it's boring and we need to move on to bigger, better, longer prayers. This would be a grave mistake. The Lord's Prayer is something like the wardrobe in C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*. It's bigger on the inside than it is on the outside. After a while we end up thinking, "Is there anything that is *not* contained in this prayer?"

It goes to work on you.

When a Christian prays the Lord's Prayer, they are reciting (and hopefully remembering) what this following Jesus business is all about. The prayer has a reciprocating effect of shaping the person who prays it. As you pray the words, you are reminded that this is what you believe, and so you believe a little deeper. As you believe a little deeper, your actions begin to align just a bit

more closely with your beliefs. There's an ancient Latin phrase that Christians have used through the centuries that summarizes this effect: *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi, Lex Vivendi*, the Law of Praying is the Law of Believing is the Law of Living.⁸ What you pray shapes what you believe shapes how you live. Another way to say it would be: prayer subverts your life.

This is a profoundly biblical conception of discipleship. The world was, after all, formed by words. God speaks all creation into existence. Christians not only believe this, but also believe that the Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us in the person of Jesus. Since we are so word-created and word-centered in our doctrine, should we not also be word-led in our discipleship? I must let the words lead and hope that my sluggish heart will catch up.



**WHAT YOU PRAY SHAPES
WHAT YOU BELIEVE SHAPES
HOW YOU LIVE.**

RENEWED IMAGINATIONS THROUGH PRAYER

Christians are in desperate need of renewed imaginations today. The future of the church in Western society appears to be one of an exhausting struggle in a secular wilderness where spiritual imaginations are stifled and in danger of dying altogether. We cannot rely on the old imagination of a culture that once shared some (not all) Christian morality. We cannot (and should not) place our hopes in retreating to personal piety, or blending in, or in winning a culture war. Rather, we must begin to imagine life as a faithful and fruitful minority that is ever seeking to subvert what is evil with good, what is hateful with love, what is corrosive with nurture. A crucial first step toward living this reimagined

LITURGY IN THE WILDERNESS

life is praying and practicing the Lord's Prayer. Therefore, each of the following chapters will explore a phrase of the Lord's Prayer by asking:

1. What is the prayer inviting a person to pray, believe, trust, and do?
2. What personal and cultural factors make this particularly difficult or impossible?
3. How does the gospel beautifully subvert this aspect of life in such a way that praying and living becomes possible for us?
4. How might we begin to reimagine the world through this prayer?

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