



An Other Kingdom: Departing the Consumer Culture

Peter Block, Walter Brueggemann, John McKnight

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Our seduction into beliefs in competition, scarcity, and acquisition are producing too many casualties. We need to depart a kingdom that creates isolation, polarized debate, an exhausted planet, and violence that comes with the will to empire. The abbreviation of this empire is called a consumer culture.

We think the free market ideology that surrounds us is true and inevitable and represents progress. We are called to better adapt, be more agile, more lean, more schooled, more, more, more. Give it up. There is no such thing as customer satisfaction.

We need a new narrative, a shift in our thinking and speaking. *An Other Kingdom* takes us out of a culture of addictive consumption into a place where life is ours to create together. This satisfying way depends upon a neighborly covenant—an agreement that we together, will better raise our children, be healthy, be connected, be safe, and provide a livelihood. The neighborly covenant has a different language than market-hype. It speaks instead in a sacred tongue.

Authors Peter Block, Walter Brueggemann, and John McKnight invite you on a journey of departure from our consumer market culture, with its constellations of empire and control. Discover an alternative set of beliefs that have the capacity to evoke a culture where poverty, violence, and shrinking well-being are not inevitable—a culture in which the social order produces enough for all. They ask you to consider this other kingdom. To participate in this modern exodus towards a modern community. To awaken its beginnings are all around us. *An Other Kingdom* outlines this journey to construct a future outside the systems world of solutions.

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From Reader Review An Other Kingdom: Departing the Consumer Culture for online ebook

Michael says

I'm very glad I read it. This is a very quick read, but boy does it make me think. It stirred my imagination about what is happening in our neighborhood, in our parish. Walter and John and Peter have been good friends of our parish and this book just continues to encourage us to imagine what practices and ways we might live into the reality of "an other kingdom." Beautiful. Thank you guys!

Brent Harris says

This is a generous punch to our consumeristic face. This little book will give you lots to think about regarding our modern way of life, the illusion of progress and our market economy. It gives a viable alternative (neighbourliness) as well albeit one that certainly requires further exploration and experimentation. Recommended for those trying to lead lives of peaceful revolution against the machine of consumerism which demands obedience and acceptance for profit, happiness and progress.

Rachel Blom says

Visionary.

That's the one word that described this book the best. An Other Kingdom is a powerful call to depart the consumer culture and return to a neighborly covenant culture.

It's a short book at under 100 pages (and that's including some commentaries), but boy, does it pack a punch. Never has a passionate rant against the consumer culture that we are all so deeply entrenched in sounded so poetic and inspiring and longing.

Okay, maybe I need to make it a bit more specific—which is not easy, since this book isn't specific or practical at all. It's broad and over-arching and rarely moves down to details, with the exception of a few concrete examples. That's intentional though, as it completely fits the vision for the three authors who rail (though lovingly) against the top-down culture and embrace the grass roots solutions.

Their main point is this: free-market consumerism is consuming us. Almost literally. It's destroying our bodies, our relationships, our minds even. It's holding us captive.

Instead, the authors describe their vision for a neighborly covenant culture. They place abundance where scarcity reigns, mystery as opposed to certainty, fallibility to perfection, and the common good above personal individualization.

This book challenged my paradigm when it comes to the consumer culture. Never before have I been so confronted with the damage this culture does to us as people, as God's people. The mindsets of scarcity, of competition, of perfection—they're destroying us bit by bit.

Maybe this is also why I've been so reluctant in using free-market techniques in promoting blog content, both for ChurchMag and for my own blog, and for the promotion of products and services I offer. Stressing scarcity for instance is a well-known sales technique ("This deal will only be available for 48 hours and after that the price will increase."), but what theology do we unconsciously promote by this? I'd never looked at it that way until I read this book.

The message of the covenant-based neighborly culture where we focus on the common good stirred my heart. It seems unrealistic, naive—but it's also incredibly hopeful. It's in line with what Alan Hirsch and other emergent church leaders are saying as well about post-Christian culture, so if that's your cup of tea you'll love this book.

Bryan Gower says

My Blog post on 'An Other Kingdom': http://communitythinker.com/an_other_...

"If he needs a million acres to make him feel rich, seems to me he needs it 'cause he feels awful poor inside hisself, and if he's poor in hisself, there ain't no million acres gonna make him feel rich, an' maybe he's disappointed that nothin' he can do 'll make him feel rich."

? John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath

What is nature of living in abundance? In John Steinbeck's novel Grapes of Wrath, the Joad family is making their way across the country toward California to escape the Oklahoma dust bowl in the 1930's with the hopes of finding work. They discover that the banks who own the farms care only for profits and growth. He describes the bank as a monster who will die without growing. Later in novel, the Joads discover that a California landowner who owns a million acres is scared and unhappy. The Joad's companion and spiritual compass, Casey, points out that despite the land owner's attempts to feel rich by buying land, if he is poor inside, the acquisition of more land will never fulfill that need to feel rich.

Peter Block, Walter Brueggemann and John McKnight challenge the cultural pursuit of profit, production and insatiable growth in their book An Other Kingdom (2016). They offer a view of abundance based not on scarcity and greed but on a belief that we have enough.

"To believe in abundance is to believe that we have enough... It's a sharp contrast to a culture organized around commerce, a market ideology built on scarcity and the central premise that we cannot believe in sufficiency. It declares that we can never be satisfied with what we have, with the effect that customer satisfaction is truly an oxymoron.

A neighborly culture would declare that nature no longer needs to be productive. That we have enough without more development. It calls for an end to the belief that a community or an institution or even business has to grow or die to survive and have a meaningful life. Believing in enough means we can stop identifying with progress as the path to the good life."

An Other Kingdom is an invitation to imagine an alternative story for our communities based on practices of neighborliness and generosity. 'Discover an alternative set of beliefs that have the capacity to evoke a culture where poverty, violence, and shrinking well-being are not inevitable.'

Jordan Varey says

"An Other Kingdom" speaks to the sense of isolation prevalent in our over connected-disconnected society. The authors provide an outline of the rise of the consumer culture that commodifies everything (including us). The free market ideology is described as the ocean that we swim in. An all encompassing worldview that feels impossible to escape. Against this backdrop the reader is encouraged to imagine a different path.

Using the metaphor of the Israelite's Exodus, from Egypt, the authors suggest that we can long for the comfort of captivity when faced with the uncertainty of the wilderness. However, the story of the Exodus is that we find abundance when we step into the dessert.

The book left me feeling hopeful for a renewal of local communities bubbling beneath the surface. Peppered with examples of covenant lifestyles, local food movements, neighbourhoods rediscovering their story and the possibility of resisting the empire this book ranks high on my list of must reads.

Curtis says

I ended up skimming a lot of it after the first few chapters.

Good message, but it felt like it needed better editing. Seems like it could have been shorter, more focused.

C.H.E. Sadaphal says

The bottom line: An eye-opening call to reconsider modern systems in a book that whisks the imagination into shape.

In his allegory of a cave, Plato once said that those in chains think the shadows on the wall are real people, and thus 'reality' is defined by shadows. Little did they know that the figures are mere projections of reality—projections of real people that stand at the entrance of the cave. An Other Kingdom awakens us to the cave, breaks our chains, and draws us into the light.

The central thrust of the book is that the Free Market Consumer Ideology—based on the pillars of scarcity, certainty, perfection and privatization—not only isn't working but is also ...

<http://www.chesadaphal.com/other-king...>

John Everard Griffith says

This is one of a number of books that explain why there is so much turmoil in the world today. We are experiencing the last gasp of the capitalist system that is called the "free market consumer ideology". They talk about the end of the commons and the emphasis on local community. The free market consumer ideology is based on scarcity, certainty, perfection and privatization. They argue for a neighborly culture

based on abundance, mystery fallibility and common good. We have reached the limits of the free market culture and need to begin building the world that will follow its collapse. This is the beginning of the conversation. They give evidence of the collapse which is easy but not a lot of evidence of ways forward.

Frank Thun says

A critique of capitalism and a plaidoyer for a re-awakening of the neighborhood. A somewhat spiritual perspective, tough sharp worded and to the point. A somewhat spiritual perspective, tough sharp worded and to the point.

Jeff Snavely says

A short but painful read of a book suffering from multiple personality disorder.

Imagine a preacher and a marxist get together and take turns espousing religion and collectivism under the guise of fighting consumer culture. Take that result and hand it to a social justice academic for some heavy editing and you have *An Other Kingdom*.

The criticisms are valid, but alternatives are not clearly articulated. The book seems fairly well received by many, but it did nothing for me.

Lauren Tomlinson says

Not really what I was expecting from this book. It ended up being more of an economic plan which seems hard to implement in our current culture.

Rob Wood says

The idea is important. The execution undergraduate. The contrast between contract and covenant is a good one.

Michael Graber says

An Other Kingdom offer potent critique of how consumerism robs humanity of its sustaining virtues. While the book does a good job articulating how consumer culture erodes shared values and makes actions and biases take root, the authors do not make a convincing or compelling alternative path. They try, but the return to biblical living and ethics seem quaint and ill-fitting at best. I wish they would have explored other models for other possible kingdoms, such as permaculture as metaphor, Buddhist economics, etc. As written, this little book is an accurate diagnosis of a problem, but their proposed solution is both weak and sentimental, only for Christians and not real enough to be practiced by that faith.

Johannes C says

I read this book somewhat slowly this week, spending more than an hour everyday, giving myself permission to pause often and contemplate. It's difficult to articulate the sacredness I experienced while reading it, and how I feel like I'm a new person after reading it, or the sense of spiritual rejuvenation I feel. I have no idea if the book will meet others in the same way. All I can say is that I encountered it at the right moment in my life -- a moment where my idealism has suffered defeat and disillusionment engendered in the face of "pragmatic realities" I encountered in academic courses in international development, in the confusion I now face over what type of job I want to work in after graduating, and in the wake of reading the hyper-utilitarian reasoning of Peter Singer. After reading this book, I now feel a new sense of hope and joy in the world.

I walk on the face of this earth slower, more at rest and more at peace, more mindful and aware, with more love, I think. This week, I ate meals slowly, without reading or watching online video lectures, without music -- but in silence. I walked without listening to audiobooks or listening to music, but aware that I was walking. I paused when my body told me to pause. Listening and feeling.

In "Living Buddha, Living Christ," Thich Nhat Hanh says:

"When the Buddha was asked, "Sir, what do you and your monks practice?" he replied, "We sit, we walk, and we eat." The questioner continued, "But sir, everyone sits, walks, and eats," and the Buddha told him, "When we sit, we know we are sitting. When we walk, we know we are walking. When we eat, we know we are eating."

These are fundamentals of any spirituality, yet for this very reason, because they are in some sense common to all spiritualities, we neglect to practice them -- or at least I do. And in this book, the prophetic language Block, McKnight, and Brueggemann share evoke a similar slowing and pausing -- as resistance and as a counter-narrative to the rush and busyness of market ideology.

I didn't think I would be able to do all those things, but I thought back to times when I have been a tourist walking around a city. Do I plug in earphones all the time, or walk around with eyes glazed thinking about things I still have to get done? Or do I walk slowly and take everything in around me? When I eat at a nice restaurant, do I read a book or watch TV with my meal, or do I pay attention to every detail? It is market ideology that dictates one has to spend lots of money on plane tickets and hotel rooms, or at a fancy restaurant, for one to value and take seriously one's time and one's experiences. But there is a counter narrative that refuses this type of logic, and says I can treasure every day I have and treat it with the same care and value; I can experience the same wonder and beauty each day.

I suspect many people I know, have known this, and I am late to this beautiful way of living, but I am glad. I have woken up early a number of times this week, and felt present and at peace, compared to typical mornings which have more than often been a struggle of blurry half-consciousness. I have eaten breakfast sitting at a table, looking out a window, awake and in the presence of God (for lack of a better way of putting it), rather than stuffing my face on a bus as I usually do. I think that's what being mindful or slowing down means for me, as a person of Christian faith: reminding myself that when I walk, I walk in the presence of God, and when I eat, I eat in the presence of God, and when I sit, I sit in the presence of God, and that my time and my everyday experiences are precious not by the standards of the neoliberal market, but because they are "gifts from God", they are externally valuable because "God says they are valuable", and their value is not subject to the logic of market ideology.

I am also glad for discovering Christopher Alexander who has become someone I really admire and has provoked me to rethink my affinity for brutalist and deconstructivist architecture. The contemplations on technology have also been especially helpful for me, as someone coming from an educational background in the applied sciences. I have been thinking more now about how technology fosters or erodes social relationships, community, and neighbourliness, and how that must be the central question for any engineer that believes in human dignity.

I have also began thinking of concrete ways I can become more neighbourly. There are many concrete examples contained within this book that have provoked me to think more carefully about what I can do. I intend to dig through this book more in the coming weeks, and possibly read it again, or sections of it again. And I'd like to write more about it in the future.

Cameron Roxburgh says

This is a very good book that is well worth the read. It follows on from Abundant Community and combines a wonderful sociological perspective with a kingdom minded perspective from Brueggemann.

It is a challenge to the way that Christians are living in their neighbourhoods and are influenced by culture.
