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In This Issue

Those who write in the area of evangelism today often urge the church to develop new forms of evangelism appropriate to a diverse and changing culture. Many of the articles in this issue helpfully make such an argument. Yet in our desire to be future-oriented and culturally-relevant, it would be a mistake to ignore lessons from the past--especially when those lessons may be precisely what is needed to develop approaches to evangelism for our day.

Among many others, E. Stanley Jones, one of the great evangelists of this century, has much to teach us. David Bundy's article shows the intrinsic theological linkage of evangelism and social justice in Jones' thought and ministry, and its implications for the reconstruction of the church. Jones' holistic vision and call for our practice to correspond to our profession is a needed word for a church that seeks to evangelize new generations in an increasingly postmodern world.

The article by Brian M. Kelly draws from the relatively new discipline of practical theology to analyze the contemporary practice of evangelism. Noting that our methodology of evangelism is linked to our concept of conversion, Kelly proposes rethinking conversion as a spiritual journey rather than a crisis experience; this in turn enables the development of more faithful and effective forms of evangelism.

The next three articles examine the implications of generational diversity for the practice of evangelism. Todd Hahn, a reflective practitioner and noted author in this area, proposes a relational and processive evangelism centered on creation, covenant, and community as a means to relate to Generation X and the Millennial Generation. Hahn's goal is not simply to reach but to disciple, and thus to develop new leaders for both church and society. The article is accompanied by an insightful response by Ron Crandall which both further develops Hahn's themes and raises significant questions for further discussion. These were originally presentations at the annual meeting of the Academy, and I have left much of their oral character intact.

While much is written about reaching younger generations, little has been done concerning evangelism and senior adults. Indeed, because senior adults compose an increasingly larger percentage of the membership of many denominations, they are often blamed for the churches' lack of evangelistic concern or effectiveness. In contrast to this common perception, Derrel Watkins provides us with a refreshingly hopeful article which not only shows how to evangelize senior adults but offers ways to engage them in the ministry of evangelism. Given the coming Baby Boomer "age wave" this is a most timely article indeed.

The last two articles bring sociological analysis to bear on evangelism, though in very different ways. Drawing an important distinction between "underchurched" and "unchurched" persons, Penny Long Marler complements her empirical analysis with a fascinating set of interviews which draw us into the world of the unchurched. She concludes that most of the underchurched and unchurched are interested in their spiritual journeys, but have often found churches alienating or uncaring. Marler advises churches to be more sensitive and relational in their evangelistic ministries.

Samuel Wilson shares implications and questions raised for evangelism from recent studies in the field of the sociology of knowledge. He argues that our cultural bias toward individualism often prevents us from seeing the cultural and communal dynamics at work in conversion, and this in turn leads us to use inappropriate forms of evangelism. Adapted from his 1998 Presidential Address to the Academy, I have chosen to retain much of its original flavor as an address.

We are pleased in this issue to include a large number of book reviews--not a record amount for the *Journal*, but certainly one of our better efforts. The flow of books published that are relevant to the theology or practice of evangelism continues unabated, and we hope these reviews will help our readers become familiar with many of them. Included as well are the minutes of the twenty-sixth annual meeting of the Academy, held at Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pennsylvania.

Henry H. Knight III

EDITORIAL: TEACHING THEOLOGY FOR EVANGELISM

The teaching of evangelism clearly involves introducing students to a range of methods. For example, students may well learn how to verbally share their faith with another person (and teach others to do the same), or to form small groups, or to make a local church more welcoming, or to preach for a response. In addition, any or all of these approaches might be examined in light of a diversity of contexts, such as rural, urban, suburban, or different generations, or postmodern culture in general. This is all to the good. What it presupposes, however, is that students are themselves highly committed to evangelism, an assumption that in many of our classrooms is increasingly problematic.

Today there are a diversity of theologies, and not every theology supports evangelism. Some not only make it superfluous but even find evangelism morally questionable. When tied to common cultural strictures against sharing one's faith--religion being seen as private and individual--these theologies can powerfully inhibit a desire to engage in evangelism.

I am not referring here to the current debate between "exclusivists" and "inclusivists" as to the destiny of the unevangelized, for both of these views can easily undergird a robust commitment to evangelism. While there are important issues at stake here, dampening a passion for evangelism is not one of them.

What I am describing is a relativizing of the gospel itself, which takes a number of forms. One comment sometimes heard in churches is "We're all trying to go to the same place." When applied to Christians and Jews, this may at least be arguable, but beyond that it does *not* seem clear that we're all trying to get to the same "place," or some even to a "place" at all. Nor is it at all clear that "we all worship the same God"--descriptively, the various gods look quite different, even as the proposed salvations look different as well. Some theologians propose a more sophisticated version. Their claim is that religions arise as persons in various cultures give expression to a prereflective experience of the divine. Hence no one religion is true, but all can provide insight into the nature of the divine.

While by no means denying that the various world religions may have much to teach us, there are certain christological and soteriological claims which are intrinsic to the gospel and inescapably universal. Chief among these is that Jesus Christ, who was crucified, is risen from the dead and now lives as Savior and Lord of all humanity. This has implications far beyond personal salvation; it gives meaning and purpose to history and hope for the redemption of creation itself. In other words, the gospel makes a fundamentally

eschatological claim, one that is necessarily universal and which inextricably links the coming reign of God with Jesus Christ.

The corresponding soteriological claim is that the life of the coming Kingdom can be received in the present, through Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit. The promise of the gospel is not only about life after death but life in the present. But this new life, because it is part of the eschatological "already," is itself both a response to God's love in Christ and a growing in that love. It involves a relationship with the God revealed in Jesus Christ, and is decisively shaped by that relationship.

This is not the place to develop all this theologically. What I am suggesting is our courses on evangelism are such places. Not only our students but those in the churches and ministries in which they serve need opportunities to think through the implications of a gospel that makes universal claims from a particular set of events in history. We cannot expect much interest in methods of evangelism apart from an excitement about the gospel itself, nor can we expect it to be motivated by a love for others without first knowing how much God has loved us in Jesus Christ.

Henry H. Knight III

RADICAL HOLINESS: SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EVANGELISM IN THE WORK OF ELI STANLEY JONES

David Bundy

E. Stanley Jones (1884-1973) was one of the most influential Christian missionaries, mission theorists and evangelists of the twentieth century. His ministry began in Kentucky while a student at Asbury College. It continued as a missionary in India and, after a return to the USA because of being expelled by the British colonial authorities from India for pro-independence sympathies, in the early 1940's he became an evangelist and crusader for evangelism and social justice around the world. He was a vocal supporter of Indian theological and national independence and an early supporter of Mahatma Gandhi. In 1928 he was elected a bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, but resigned after one day because he wanted to fulfill his calling as a missionary and evangelist. He was a controversial figure in most North American circles because of his mission theory and his mission commitments. Part of this controversy had to do with the integral linkage he maintained between social justice and evangelism. The thesis of this essay is that E. Stanley Jones, like much of the Wesleyan/Holiness movement which nurtured him, refused to honor the stark division between evangelism and social justice that has characterized so much of twentieth century North American Christianity. For him the two were intertwined and mutually supportive.

Research about Jones has tended to focus on a clarification of his biography and of his position on theological issues.[1] There have also been efforts to analyze Jones's missiological legacy,[2] his involvement in the "Indian renaissance" of 1918-1930[3] as well as to interpret his mission theory and its development in light of Jones' "Theology of the Kingdom of God.[4] However, historians of mission theory have generally ignored him,[5] partially because he developed that theory in his autobiographical writings.[6] Historians of American culture have generally interpreted Jones as a proponent of "harmonial religion[7] or as the writer of "the perfect swan song of American liberalism."[8] Neither of these adequately describes Jones, who must be understood in light of the tradition which formed him, that is the Wesleyan/Holiness movement at the edges of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Certainly he was widely known for

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the many devotional guides and books on spirituality;[9] however there was also a sharp ethical concern which radiated through his work. Therefore, this essay begins with a discussion of Jones's social, theological and missiological formation. It then explores the development of his analysis of the relationship between social justice and evangelism, first in India and then in the United States of America. Finally it reflects on his vision for "Reconstructing the Church."

The Formation of Jones: The Sources of His Ethical and Evangelistic Concerns

Converted under the influence of the Wesleyan/Holiness Methodist Episcopal minister Robert Bateman in Philadelphia, Jones was formed in the Sunday School of the Philadelphia congregation under the tutelage of Nelly Logan. She listened to him and guided him with gentle wisdom as he left that secure context for Asbury College. The letters to her from his college period reflect the bravado of the insecure college student who is both offended and intimidated by the new surroundings. Slowly he adapted to the new context. He became a regular supply preacher and evangelist for the small Kentucky Methodist Episcopal congregations and there sharpened his communication tools. Reflecting later, he considered that he had learned little at Asbury College, but that was to "protest too much." He certainly listened and absorbed Wesleyan/Holiness theology at a reasonably sophisticated level and was also made aware of alternative visions for mission within the Wesleyan/Holiness movement that were being suppressed within the Methodist Mission establishment. The theological perspective of Jones, which evolved with his experience, remained always congruent with the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition, as can be seen in his devotional, autobiographical and theoretical writings.[10]

During Jones's four years at Asbury College, there were two central figures in the Wesleyan/Holiness missionary pantheon whose luster exceeded the others. These were William Taylor and Taylor's colleague/protégé, James Thoburn. Both of these figures had worked within the context of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Both rose from troublemakers to the rank of Missionary Bishop. Both were advocates for processes of establishing self-supporting congregations instead of "mission churches" controlled by the mission society/board of the North American church. Both drew their primary support from the Wesleyan/Holiness Movement that functioned primarily at and beyond the boundaries of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Both favored an approach to mission, which took the recipient culture seriously. Both lost in their struggle to transform the mission program of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Their exploits were still fresh in the minds of Wesleyan/Holiness

believers when Jones was in college and when he felt his call to missions.

William Taylor (1822-1902)[11] began his missionary career as a missionary to San Francisco where he established a church, a ministry to seamen, and a temperance hotel. He gained a national reputation as a street preacher and through his writings became an important source for California history. When his temperance hotel burned, leaving him in debt, he began speaking first in the Eastern USA and Canada, before currency fluctuations drove him to serve as an evangelist in Australia in hopes of raising monies to resolve his indebtedness. He then went to South Africa because of his son's health, and from there to the Caribbean, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Australia, India, England, and then South America. Everywhere he went many, especially native peoples, responded to his revivalistic preaching. Taylor organized these into congregations, appointed clergy and left them as self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-theologizing churches—without seeking the approval of either the bishops or the mission board.[12] This caused a firestorm of controversy within the mission establishment. He was forced to "locate," which meant to function as a lay member of a local congregation. He chose to locate in a church which he had founded in India, but went to South America to establish more churches. While there he was elected lay delegate from the South India Conference to the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1884. After a spirited defense of his mission methods on the Conference floor, Taylor was elected Missionary Bishop for Africa. This was with the understanding that his congregations in Latin America would be allowed to remain self-supporting. This agreement lasted until the year that Taylor retired. The breaking of that agreement would have far-ranging consequences.[13] Taylor retired as Missionary Bishop for Africa in 1896 and died the year Jones entered Asbury College. In celebration of Taylor's life, one of his sermons was reprinted and circulated to all Asbury students and faculty as well as supporters of the institution.[14]

James Mills Thoburn (1836-1922) retired from a life as a missionary in India in 1908, two years after the arrival of Jones on the sub-continent.[15] Thoburn went to India in 1859. After eleven years of enormous efforts for modest gains, he invited William Taylor, who he had heard preach at an American camp meeting and whose success in communicating with Native peoples in South Africa and the Caribbean was well known, to work with the Methodist Episcopal Mission in India. Thoburn came to distrust Indian culture more than Taylor although he shared Taylor's interest in the cultural structures of India.[16] Like Jones, Thoburn would write about spirituality. His volume, *The Church at Pentecost* reflects many themes that would become common to Jones. For example, Thoburn insisted on sanctification (reunion with God) as

the goal of Christian life.[17] He also combined the emphases on radical spirituality and radical social witness. "It would add immensely to the power of the Church of Christ to-day," he argued, "if all believers were to exhibit to the world the cordial and warm social intercourse which formed so prominent a feature in the life of the first Christian Church."[18] As would Jones, he suggested that evangelism in India would greatly facilitated if Christians lived as Christ had lived.[19]

In addition to this radical missiological vision, Jones also imbibed both the radical social postures of the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition as well as its American individualistic understanding of personal salvation. The Wesleyan/Holiness movement had been at the forefront of the Abolitionist Movement as well as in favor of both the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments to the constitution in favor of emancipation and political rights for African-Americans. They had also resisted the racist science of pre-Adamism and the application of evolutionary theory to describe and evaluate cultural differences between races. Asbury College had been established only a decade before Jones's arrival as an outpost of classical culture removed from the perceived social sins of the period.[20] Personal conversion to Christ was considered the prerequisite for lasting social transformation and the personal sins were catalogued by the tradition in litanies of asceticism and personal denial.

The Wesleyan *ordo salutis* was personalized and explicit, with the clear goals of personal sanctification and social transformation. It was this legacy of radical holiness that Jones took with him to India and which forms the core of his writings. It gave him a base from which he could begin to think about the nature of mission and evangelism in India. The personal religious and social concerns remained factors of his thought even as he adapted his understandings of theology and culture under the influence of his experience.

Evangelism in India and Racism in America: Toward the *Christ of Every Road*

Jones's first book was *The Christ of the Indian Road.*[21] This volume reflected upon nearly two decades of mission efforts in India and described, within an autobiographical framework, the processes by which his understanding of the "Kingdom of God" had changed. He argued for the inculturation of Christianity in India using Indian philosophy and culture as sustaining structures for the presentation of the Gospel.[22] He described his relationship with Mahatma Gandhi who he had gone to meet in 1923 immediately after Gandhi's first prison term. He told of the "Ashram," a concept not unlike the American camp meeting, but which was a purely indigenous forum for gathering people together to reflect on the central verities of life under the guidance of a teacher.[23] Like Taylor

before him, Jones was willing, even eager, to adapt ideas and structures in India to shape his own theory and practice of mission.[24]

In *Christ of the Indian Road*, Jones confronted head-on the problem of institutionalized racism in America and in South Africa, especially in the churches. He observed that in America and in South Africa, Christians who supported evangelism and mission in India would not admit someone like Gandhi to their own churches. He understood that many wanted Gandhi to become Christian, assuming that as a Christian he would not continue to lead the Indian independence movement. Jones informed these North American Christians that the racism of the American churches was well known in India. The support of the racist Ku Klux Klan by those claiming to be Christian was also widely known. There could not be effective evangelism in India, or elsewhere in Asia and Africa, Jones insisted, until there was social justice in the USA. He understood a national commitment to social justice and the support of social justice by the churches as prerequisites for evangelism.[25]

This call for social justice for the support of evangelism continued in *Christ at the Round Table*. He insisted that the white races should renounce imperialism.[26] In *Christ of Every Road* Jones lamented that America was a land consumed by racism. It was, he realized, a place that viewed Christianity as fitting only into the province of the American and European appropriations of Graeco-Roman culture. To the contrary, he argued, every language, culture and people can be the medium for divine action in the world. God, he insisted, was not restricted to Christians by which to accomplish the divine actions. Persons such as Gandhi were "irregular channels" of God's grace and action. He urged his readers to strive for sanctification through which they might see the world and people as God sees them, so that evangelism could effectively occur.[27]

The same concern lay behind his analysis of the attractiveness of Communism to the exploited world. He did not minimize the problems of the Soviet application of Marxist theory, but understood that the egalitarian vision, which supported the aspirations of persons against the exploitative structures of the state and unfettered colonial style capitalism, would be a siren call to multitudes. The church had, during the colonial era, always positioned itself with the colonial powers. It had supported the colonists and then provided pastoral care for the soldiers and business interests. When things became difficult, missionaries were not slow to seek military assistance from the British or other powers. His visit to Moscow, on his way to India in 1934, transformed again his vision of the "Kingdom of God" and he saw that Christians must struggle for global social justice and proclaim the egalitarian vision of the New Testament if there is to be effective evangelism.[28] The answer was not to become Marxist but to become more thoroughly Christian.

Essential to this renewed understanding of Christian life and values was a proper understanding of race. No longer, he inveighed, "can the white race act as though they are a messianic color."[29] He explained, on the basis of personal conversations, that people who are the object of European-American racist attitudes understand the disjunction between European-American values and Christian theory. They are alienated from Christ because of the attitudes of those who claim to be Christian while despising others because of race. Among Christians he noted that "many of us are willing as white people to work for the people of another race, but not *with* them."[30] We must come to the realization, Jones insisted, that "there is no messianic race and there is no messianic class.[31] Racial justice was for Jones one aspect of social justice. However, as he looked at the global structures of Christianity and race, he understood that the issue of American racial injustice was the most foundational problem facing those who would seek to convince others of the Gospel of Christ.

On Being a Christian in America

In 1944 Jones found himself back in North America. He realized that he would not soon return to India and began to make his peace with that reality. He confessed: "I talked to America from the outside. I preached *at* her, and most of that preaching was critical. America was not what I had hoped to find.... I never belonged."[32] He noted that the United States of America had a legacy of privileging moral concerns over personal concerns and of being a place where religious concerns are nearly omnipresent. There were, however, a number of hesitations held by the European-Americans about the word "all" in the "Declaration of Independence." These hesitations or exceptions included: (1) those outside the original colonies; (2) women's rights; (3) children's rights; (4) labor rights; (5) rights for "people of color;" (6) rights for immigrants from Asia; and, (7) rights for those beyond the borders of the USA who come in contact with American interests.[33] Each of these was discussed with regard to the attitudes of the churches. He argued that the churches generally do not hold attitudes different from those of the general population.

His primary concern, however, was racism in America and in the churches. He expressed concern that despite the efforts of a few, racial issues had not received the attention needed to reform a system of injustice that was clearly problematic for the churches and evangelism. Noting that the early church overcame racism, he lamented that "the Christian Church in America has apostatized, and instead of being a voice it has become an echo.... The spirit of the surrounding culture has invaded the Christian Church and made us into its own image."[34] Jones insisted that the church must work to

transform itself from the baseline of its own principles. The traditions of Christian faith and national character offer a base for hope for the future and for the transformation of this terrible social injustice, argued Jones. Through the transformation of individuals within the church to the vision of Christ for humanity, Christians can learn to live with themselves and with the larger corpus of humanity. "Christianity must be a reconciling, unity-bringing power."[35]

Jones suggested that six factors might well help heal this gap in American culture and Christianity. These were: (1) racial prejudice is not inherent but socially imposed; (2) no cultures based on such a wrong can be stable; (3) Christian teaching, if not behavior, is "clear as a crystal" about the spuriousness of distinctions based on race; (4) modern science does not support racially described distinctions as the earlier science did; (5) the "all" in American democracy will eventually include all; and, (6) other races have demonstrated their ability to achieve and so no culturally based generalizations can be maintained.[36]

What he said for the nation he would say for the churches in tones later found in the speeches of Martin Luther King:[37]

> What and where is America? America is a dream—unfulfilled. A dream of equality of opportunity, of privilege and property widely distributed; a dream of a place where class is abolished and where a man (sic) is a man (sic), a place where race and birth and color are transcended by the fact of a common brotherhood, a place where humanity as humanity can begin again a fresh experiment in human brotherhood that will be a new beginning for the race as a whole, a place where all our gifts and resources are held not for ourselves alone but as instruments of service for the rest of humanity—that is the dream.

More than two decades later, even after the Civil Rights Movement had started to awaken the conscience of the churches and of the USA on a larger scale, Jones felt it necessary to return to the theme in his volume about new paradigms for the church.[38] In that 1970 volume he addressed a series of social justice issues. Racism merited an entire chapter as did class justice issues. He concluded his chapter on race with the prescription for the church:[39]

> The reconstructed church must be "a house of prayer for all nations," and all races and colors; or else it will be "a den of thieves" where we steal privileges intended for all and try to make them exclusively our own. But if they don't belong to all, they belong to none.

Throughout these volumes Jones argued that it is the duty of Christians to work for a solution to justice problems of society, especially the racial justice issues. It was for him a biblical and moral imperative. He opined that such a reformation of Western church and culture would expedite evangelism among the oppressed persons of the world. The Gospel, he intimated, cannot be good news to the oppressed if it does not also address the oppression. Jones was adamant in insisting that the souls of those who condone oppression are corrupted by being oppressors or by condoning oppression.

Conclusion

Jones was very clear, from 1924 to the end of his life, about his goals. His primary goal was to transform the church and call it back to Christian values and spirituality. He felt that the church had accommodated itself too much to the values of American and European culture and that the sins of racism, classism and imperialism had rendered the church an ineffective tool for the evangelization of the world.[40] This social analysis regarding the comparative moral and social values of the church and the world outside the church provided the basis from which Jones worked. The solution to the church's history of conformity to the non-Christian values of the surrounding culture, Jones insisted, was a "reconstruction of the church" in which the values of the Gospel were received by those who had experienced a personal conversion to Christ. Personal conversion was central and preliminary to all other transformations. Leading persons to conversion, that is evangelism, was the task of the church. Evangelism, he argued, was the central concern of the early church: "All the organization [the church] was pointed toward one thing—evangelism. This was primary and all else was secondary."[41] However, personal conversion was not considered sufficient in itself.

There were two motivations for reforming personal spirituality and the church: (1) it was inherently right to stand for Gospel values; and, (2) without a reformed church that works for social justice, that is for the establishment of Christ's kingdom, effective evangelism could not take place. Therefore, there was for Jones no split between social justice and evangelism. The two were integrally linked. Either one without the other would be, he argued, hollow and partial. He insisted:[42]

> The Gospel of the person of Jesus and the Gospel of the Kingdom viewed as one puts together the individual and the social. We need both. An individual gospel without a social gospel is a soul without a body, and a social gospel without an individual gospel is a body without a soul. One is a ghost and the other is a corpse. You can take your choice. I don't want one or the other. I want both. The ghost and the corpse together makes a living person.

This is the radical holiness vision by which Jones longed to reconstruct the church. This is not the traditional perspective of either of the poles of American Christianity predominant during the period 1924-1970. It fits neither the Evangelical nor the Liberal models for ministry and evangelism. It stands as a challenge to both. It does however find strong resonance in the Wesleyan/Holiness and Pentecostal traditions as well as the African-American denominations. Out of Jones's background in the Wesleyan/Holiness movements and out of his experience of the deleterious effects of social injustice in the Western societies for evangelism in India came a clearly articulated vision for evangelism and social justice. Both are necessary and both support the success of the other.

NOTES

[1]The most important of the early analyses are three unpublished dissertations: C. Chacko Thomas, "The Work and Thought of Eli Stanley Jones, with special reference to India." Ph.D. Diss. State University of Iowa, 1955; Kenneth Ralph Thompson, "The Ethics of E. Stanley Jones." Ph.D. Diss. Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. 1960; Martin Ross Johnson, "The Christian Vision of E. Stanley Jones: Missionary Evangelist, Prophet and Statesman." Ph.D. Diss. Florida State University, 1978. More precise in scope is the work of Tomas Shivute, *The Theology of Mission and Evangelism in the International Missionary Councils from Edinburgh to New Delhi* (Missiologian ja ekumeniikan seuran julkaisuja/Annals of the Finnish Society of Missiology and Ecumenics, 31; Helsinki: Suomen Lahetysseura/Finnish Missionary Society, 1980) that discusses the influence of Jones on the missionary councils as well as his criticisms of those processes.

[2]Richard W. Taylor, "The Legacy of E. Stanley Jones," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 6(1982) 102-107.

[3]Sigfrid Deminger, *Evangelist pa indiska villkor. Stanley Jones och den indiska renässansen 1918-1930* (Studia Missionalia Uppsaliensia, 42; Örebro: Bokförlaget, 1985).

[4]David Bundy, "The Theology of the Kingdom of God in E. Stanley Jones," Wesleyan Theological Journal 23(1980), 58-80.

[5]See, for example, William R. Hutchinson, *Errand to the World. American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) as well as Joel Carpenter and Wilbert R. Shenk, *Earthen Vessels. American Evangelicals and Foreign Missions, 1880-1980.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990). While these excellent works could not include everyone, the absence of reference to Jones and to other Wesleyan/Holiness writers in these works indicates a lacuna for additional research and writing.

[6]David Bundy, "Song of Ascents: Autobiographical Reflection and the Development of the Mission Theory of E. Stanley Jones," forthcoming in *Missiology*.

[7]Sidney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1972), 1031-1032. Ahlstrom also suggested that Jones "proved beyond doubt that liberal theology, deep respect for other world religions..., strong ecumenical interests and active participation in Methodist Church life by no means need keep a man from publishing a large literature on personal peace and power (p. 1032)."

[8]Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935), 180. This was in reference to E. Stanley Jones, *The Christ of the American Road* (New York, Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1944) which is discussed below.

[9]These volumes, which have not yet been subjected to a scholarly analysis, include E. Stanley Jones, *Victorious Living* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1936); *idem*, *Abundant Living* (New York, Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1942); *idem*, *The Way* (New York, Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1946); *idem*, *Growing Spiritually* (New York, Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1953); *idem*, *Mastery: The Art of Mastering Life* (New York, Nashville: Abingdon, 1955); *idem*, *Christian Maturity* (New York, Nashville: Abingdon, 1957); *idem*, *In Christ* (New York, Nashville: Abingdon, 1961); and, *idem*, *The Word Became Flesh* (New York, Nashville: Abingdon, 1963).

[10]For a detailed analysis of the early years of Jones' ministry, see Bundy, "Theology of the Kingdom of God," 60-67; and, Johnson, "The Christian Vision of E. Stanley Jones."

[11]On Taylor, see, David Bundy, "Bishop William Taylor and Methodist Mission: A Study in Nineteenth Century Social History," *Methodist History* 27,4(July 1989), 197-210 and 28,1(October 1989), 2-21; and *idem*, "William Taylor, 1821-1902: Entrepreneurial Maverick for the Indigenous Church," *Mission Legacies: Biographical Studies of Leaders of the Modern Missionary Movement* ed. G. H. Anderson, et al. American Society of Missiology Series, 19; Maryknoll, Orbis, 1995), 461-468.

[12]Taylor wrote of his mission theory in a variety of autobiographical and missiological books. Perhaps the most important are: William Taylor, *Christian Adventures in South Africa* (London: Jackson, Walford and Hodder; New York: Carlton and Porter, 1867), and, *idem*, *Pauline Methods of Missionary Work* Philadelphia: National Association for the Promotion of Holiness, 1879.

[13]See David Bundy, "Unintended Consequences: The Methodist Episcopal Missionary Society and the Beginnings of Pentecostalism in Norway and Chile," forthcoming in *Missiology*.

[14]William Taylor, *My Kaffir Sermon, or, The Gospel Savingly Preached to the Heathen in a Single Sermon* (Louisville: Pentecostal Publishing House, [circa 1904].

[15]On Thoburn's life and ministry, see Guy D. Garrett, "The Missionary Career of James Mills Thoburn," Ph.D. Diss. Boston University, 1968.

[16]See, for example, James Mills Thoburn, *India and Malaysia* (Cincinnati: Cranston & Curtis; New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1892) where he also discusses Christian mission on the sub-continent. Among others he discusses William Taylor (pps. 292-298) and the work of his sister Isabella Thoburn at Lucknow. Another volume, unfortunately titled, which was written as an introduction to the issues facing prospective missionaries in India is far more appreciative of India than the title, probably chosen by a zealous publisher: James Mills Thoburn, *The Christian Conquest of India* (Forward Mission Study Courses; New York, Toronto: Young People's Missionary Movement, 1906).

[17]James Mills Thoburn, *The Church at Pentecost* (Calcutta: Methodist Publishing House; New York: Eaton and Mains, 1899),31-50 *et passim*.

[18]Ibid., 352.

[19]Ibid., 311-424 *et passim*.

[20]On this heritage, see Timothy Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (New York: Abandon, 1957), Victor B. Howard, *Religion and the Radical Republican Movement, 1860-1870* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1990) and David Bundy, "Blaming the Victim: The Wesleyan Holiness Movement in American Culture,"*Wesleyan Theological Journal* 32(1997), 161-178.

[21]E. Stanley Jones, *Christ of the Indian Road* (New York: Abingdon, 1925).

[22]This was an early theme for Jones and remained central to his understanding of mission throughout his life. See his early essay, "The Influence of the Indian Heritage upon India," The *Indian Witness* 54 (1923) 909-910, 927-928; 55(1924) 9, 6, 11. This was taken over directly from the writings of the Indian theologian D. M. Devashahayam, "Indian Characteristics that should be Preserved in the Indian Church," *The National Missionary Intelligencer* (17(1922), 170-177. This plagiarism would not be condoned today, but in the 1920's it was less serious and it does reflect the fact that Jones, unlike most missionaries, was willing to adapt the thought of Indian theologians as his own. Johnson, "The Christian Vision of E. Stanley Jones" noted the centrality of this essay for Jones thought (pps. 37-55). Richard W. Taylor, *The Contribution of E. Stanley Jones* (Confessing the Faith in India, 9: Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1973), 41-47, reprinted this text as one of the six seminal texts for understanding Jones.

[23]E. Stanley Jones, "A Proposed Ashram at Sat Tal," *The Indian Witness* 60(1930), 27-28; and *idem*, "The Ashram Ideal," in *Indian Church Problems of Today*, ed. Bishop Brenton Thoburn Badley (Madras: Methodist Publishing House, 1930), 44-51. See also Bundy, "Theology of the Kingdom of God," 65-66.

[24]William Taylor, *Four Years Campaign in India* (London: Hodder and Stoughton; New York: Eaton and Mains, 1875).

[25]Jones, *Christ of the Indian Road*, 108-116.

[26]E. Stanley Jones, *Christ at the Round Table* (New York: Abingdon, 1928), 219.

[27]E. Stanley Jones, *The Christ of Every Road: A Study of Pentecost* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930).

[28]E. Stanley Jones, *Christ's Alternative to Communism* (New York: Abingdon, 1935); *idem*, *The Choice Before Us* (New York: Abingdon, 1937); *idem*, *Christ and Present World Issues*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1937); *idem*, *Is the Kingdom of God Realism?* (New York: Abingdon, 1940).

[29]Jones, *Christ's Alternative to Communism*, 205.

[30]Jones, *Christ's Alternative to Communism*, 207. Emphasis in original.

[31]Jones, *Christ's Alternative to Communism*, 211.

[32]E. Stanley Jones, *The Christ of the American Road* (New York, Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1944), 10.

[33]Jones, *The Christ of the American Road*, 66-89.

[34]Jones, *The Christ of the American Road*, 97.

[35]Jones, *The Christ of the American Road*, 118.

[36]Jones, *The Christ of the American Road*, 169-180.

[37]Jones, *The Christ of the American Road*, 60.

[38]E. Stanley Jones, *Reconstruction of the Church—On What Pattern?* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970).

[39]Jones, *Reconstruction of the Church*, 91.

[40]Jones, *Reconstruction of the Church*, 52-106 *et passim.*

[41]Jones, *Reconstruction of the Church*, 174.

[42]Jones, *Reconstruction of the Church*, 193.

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AND EVANGELISM

Brian M. Kelly

At the dawn of a new millennium it is imperative the Christian church take a fresh look at the task of evangelism. No other issue in the life of the church, except perhaps the subject of prayer, receives so much attention with so little action as evangelism. This estrangement between intention and practice is worsened by the decided lack of accurate theological reflection on evangelism, which is not surprising considering the scarcity of practicing evangelists who are theologians and vice versa.

Moreover, the question of how to actualize effective evangelism is too often addressed by the incorporation of a wholesale pragmatism in the evangelistic endeavor. The advent of each new and seemingly successful methodology is followed by its eager importation and application in other church contexts. Unfortunately, implementation generally is not due to any inherent theological integrity, but rather because of the results produced elsewhere, proving that pragmatism reigns supreme as the end justifies the means. Further, that end itself, pursued so diligently by lay persons and clergy alike, is in fact flawed. As is often the case, a significant aspect of the problem may also contain the key to the solution; in this case the mistaken focus on crisis as the overarching paradigm for conversion. Because of the link between one's concept of conversion and the practice of evangelism, if the former is misconceived, the latter will naturally lose its effectiveness.

Neither an effortless nor too simplistic solution to the gargantuan task of restoring a lifestyle of evangelism to the third millennium Church, such as experienced in the first century church, will be proposed here.[1] Nevertheless, both church and academy have a responsibility to attempt some new propositions to further the Lord's great purposes in the world. As a student of both church and academy, I am excited by the potential which an application of the discipline of practical theology to evangelism efforts within local churches offers for a restoration of a lifestyle of evangelism.

Toward that end, I propose that conversion should be conceived as an ongoing process, a spiritual journey, rather than narrowly viewed as a sudden crisis encounter. Proceeding from this premise, I envision effective evangelism as emerging from a practical theology that is dialogical in method, biblical in basis, spiritual in dimension, communal in context and wholistic in scope.

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This kind of theological reflection will move churches, and the individuals of which they are comprised, toward the realization of a lifestyle of evangelism.

The Character of Practical Theology

The structure of practical theology holds the key to positive change in the way churches approach the task of evangelism.[2] Through the implementation of four phases of interaction employed in practical theology, churches can develop an effective pedagogy in the formation, implementation, and subsequent evaluation of evangelism practices. These phases involve devising a specific description of the dilemma, encouraging a genuine dialogue within accepted oral and written traditions, formulating reasonable intentions, and finally, setting in motion sensible applications toward the resolution of the dilemma.[3] This framework should be incorporated into the teaching, reflection, and implementation of a practical theology of evangelism for each specific church context.

Properly executed, this process assures that evangelism methods reflect a genuine discernment of Theopraxis,[4] are properly contextualized to each local field, have developed the necessary criteria to provide for evaluation and correction, and most important, emerge from the life of the church and ordinary believers rather than academia. Such an approach militates against theological estrangement, widespread pragmatism, overly simplistic views of conversion, and the implementation of ineffective methods of evangelism.

The Extent of the Dilemma

Empirical Data

Empirical studies indicate the scope of the problem facing the church when it comes to evangelism.[5] A recent study of 845 adult Christians from 34 different churches, characterized the link between conversion experience (Sudden, Gradual, or Unconscious) and evangelism. Respondents answered questions about their evangelism involvement, their personal conversion story, their theology of evangelism, and their likely involvement in various evangelism methods. Perhaps the most interesting statistic is that nearly 70% of those Christians polled had either a Gradual conversion experience (42.6%) or had always been a Christian (26.3%), compared to less than a third who attest to a Sudden conversion (31.1%). This data concurs with numerous other studies throughout the last century.[6]

The data affirm that there is a significant relationship between one's Conversion Story and several beliefs about conversion. As might be expected, those with an Unconscious or Gradual

conversion place a higher emphasis on conversion as a lifelong process. Those with a Sudden conversion place a higher emphasis on the belief that Christians are cognizant of their conversion and need a dynamic spiritual experience. For some reason not clear from this data, those with an Unconscious and Gradual conversion find church involvement to be less important than those from the Sudden category. Conversely, there is a significant tendency for those with a Sudden conversion to downplay the importance of baptism, especially when compared to those with an Unconscious conversion. In these four aspects, at least, it seems there is a link between what people have experienced themselves and their theology of conversion.

Another intriguing finding is the significant disparity in the ranking of the four basic spiritual disciplines in importance.[7] Almost twice as many with a Sudden conversion saw Prayer and Bible reading as absolutely essential than those with an Unconscious conversion. The disparity is even greater in the discipline of Sharing conversion. The disparity is even greater in the discipline of Sharing one's Faith. Why would those who are converted suddenly appear so much more zealous in sharing their faith than those who have been Christians all their lives? Perhaps, the answer has more to do with the evangelism methods offered than the degree of zealousness in the believer.

Furthermore, regardless of the conversion experience, respondents consistently and significantly ranked evangelism as less important than the other spiritual disciplines. This lower emphasis on evangelism would seem to stand the NT on its head. A thorough reading of the NT texts indicates no less a focus on evangelism than on the need for prayer, fellowship, or respect for scriptural knowledge. As such, the contemporary church is in danger of perpetuating a vicious cycle in which the inferiority of evangelism, and the scarcity of evidence for a lifestyle of evangelism, affirms for new converts the relative unimportance of evangelism as a spiritual discipline.[8]

The data also show that how people come to Christ influences their likelihood of involvement in certain evangelism methods. For every method, those with a Sudden conversion endorsed more willingness to get involved than those with a Gradual conversion, and they in turn were more likely to do so than with an Unconscious conversion. For example, those methods that reflect fairly public or intentional evangelism endeavors, such as "sharing a testimony in public," are the ones which both the Gradual and Unconscious convert are less likely to participate in, according to the results. Assuming that more assertive methods of evangelism view conversion as a punctiliar event evoked by a crisis experience, it stands to reason that individuals with a sudden Conversion Story would be more likely to employ these methods, as the data seem to indicate.

Similarly, those with a Sudden conversion are much more likely to "pray a prayer of repentance with someone who asked them to" than those from the other categories. Because this type of evangelism is uncommon in the more gradual conversion experience, such activities may fail to resonate with those respondents' understanding of how conversion, and consequently evangelism, takes place.

As a caveat, the difficulty of measuring (empirically) the various aspects of Christian conversion should be appreciated. Conversion is a highly personal, spiritual experience not easily quantified or characterized apart from subjective self-disclosure of the phenomenon. In addition to the paucity of actual scientific data, the wide disparity in nomenclature regarding the conversion story causes confusion. Perhaps in the future, organizations like the AETE and other academic entities will attempt to formulate some specific definitions to be recognized and accepted, at least within academia.[9]

The State of Evangelism

The empirical data supports some basic assertions to be made concerning the state of evangelism within the American church. The lack of practical theological reflection on the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of actual evangelism methodologies results in capitulation to a pervasive pragmatism in the church when it comes to evangelism methodology.[10] Because of this, evangelism methodologies tend to lack biblical integrity and often fail to resonate with the conversion experience of the average believer. The distressing consequence is a dearth of effective and wholesome evangelism effort taking place.

Too often decisions concerning evangelism in local churches are not based on a genuine Theopraxis, or attempts to discern the leading of the Spirit. Unless pastors and leaders are willing to do the hard work of seeking God and developing a comprehensive theology of evangelism for their context, they will succumb to the temptation of expediency. Instead, leaders should realize that a stress on tangible results threatens to reduce evangelism to an overly simplistic task, neglects the complex nature of conversion, and makes commonplace the dynamic interactions that occur between the human and the divine in that process. The answer lies in training ordinary Christians to discern more readily Theopraxis and develop their theological skills in evangelism.

However, due to an unhealthy bifurcation which exists between the church and the academy in respect to the study of theology, theological reflection is seen in contemporary Christian culture as a purely academic discipline having little or nothing to do with the actual day-to-day life of the average churchgoer. When the

intellectual disciplines became independent of the church this evoked a new response, the promotion of a clerical paradigm for defining theology.[11]

Furthermore, when the practice of the church focuses almost solely on the delivery of sermons and instruction from clergy as the primary pedagogy for theological education, the division between religious faith and the routines of life is enlarged. Because this practice reduces the believer's relationship to the Christian tradition primarily to an exposition of biblical text as a means of arriving at truth, it "subverts the very basis of the reflective wisdom of the believer."[12] Unhappily, in this way professional clergy help to sustain unhealthy compartmentalization in the life of the believer and perpetuate the myth that evangelism is the responsibility of the formally trained. An overemphasis on the power of the pulpit or classroom encourages ordinary Christians to be passive listeners instead of active participants in the work of the church. This concentration on professional clergy as the locus of all theologies represents a major structural challenge to revisioning the sharing of faith as a habit to be practiced by every believer.

Consequently, apart from participation in church activities, many laypeople are not encouraged to discern actively the work of God in their lives, or the lives of those outside the faith. This disparages the discernment of the genuine move of God in everyday tasks. Worse yet, unbelievers get the point as well - the Christian God is not to be found outside the context of church services and is only present where compelling spiritual phenomena are manifested! If a lifestyle of evangelism is to be recovered, the ordinary Christian must embrace and practice a theology of evangelism that is internalized and self-initiated.

This lack of theological reflection is the genesis of other problems. A symptomatic focus on the shortage of evangelism tends to cloud the real issue of why people fail to get involved in evangelism efforts. Not only is there a decided lack of long-term fruit to excite enthusiasm in evangelism efforts, but the methods of evangelism offered too often fail to resonate with the conversion experience of their constituency or lack enough theological integrity to spur involvement. By limiting the methodologies offered to only those which reflect a crisis conversion theology, especially within congregations whose constituents primarily attest to process rather than event oriented conversions, lay participation is discouraged and decisions are affirmed to abstain from involvement. In addition, the primary focus of conversion has been almost solely on the individual context, rather than the communal aspects of salvation and its impact on the entire cosmos. Within both the academy and the church, the traditional protestant understanding of salvation as a punctiliar event which affects primarily individuals must be challenged theologically.

These problems are part of the specific description of the current dilemma. What then, can be done to resolve these issues? By working through the process of developing a practical theology of evangelism, churches can mobilize Christians further along a spiritual journey that will invigorate the life of the church as well as those who do not yet know Christ.

Spiritual Journey Revisited

I believe Spiritual Journey to be the most appropriate paradigm with which to conceive the conversion process. The concept of lifelong spiritual pilgrimage has considerable epistemological significance. Spiritual journey is an overarching paradigm for understanding the entirety of human existence. From Toyota and U.S. Navy commercials to 900 line psychics, "journey" has become a national buzz word of sorts, a theme prevalent in the popular culture. However, what I have in mind here is Christian conversion seen as a multifarious process that entails three phases; quest, encounter, and transformation.[13] While every human is capable of experiencing all three phases of the spiritual journey, only those who commit their lives to Christ will ever actually go beyond the quest stage; the rest will remain "lost." Finally, Christian conversion is ongoing, involving a complex process of transformation.

The first phase, spiritual *quest,* involves the aspects of human pilgrimage in which persons seek after a deeper knowledge of the reason for their existence. All humans are being drawn by God back to him. While Christians cannot force movement along this path (this is the work of the Holy Spirit), they can help explain some of the paradoxes of human experience that hold people back from taking the next step toward reconciliation. Thus, the essence of evangelism consists of determining where people are on this journey and helping them along their path back to God.

The second phase is *encounter.* For some, their view of conversion consists primarily of this step in which a commitment is made to Jesus Christ. What is more important, this stage involves the discernment of Theopraxis, a recognition of the atoning work done by Christ at the Cross, followed by an obedient human response to the presence of God, which results in transformation stemming from genuine repentance and faith.

The final phase, *transformation* is the natural fruit of an ongoing discernment of Theopraxis in the life of the Christian believer. This comprises not only a quantity of life (eternal) but a quality of life as well, whereby the believer's ongoing personal relationship with Jesus shapes and transforms every other relationship along the spiritual pilgrimage.

All three aspects must be incorporated into the evangelistic endeavor, lest people turn away from God because encounter was

prematurely pressed upon them before the Spirit brought them completely through their quest to the place of faith. Similarly, an undue focus on encounter alone can lead to the neglect of the serious responsibility of nurturing people along the path of transformation as an intrinsic part of the evangelistic process.

Five Aspects of Theological Reflection on Evangelism

In order to promote a more thorough and accurate reflection for the formation of a Practical Theology of Evangelism using the journey model, at least five aspects should be addressed.[14]

First of all, the whole process of evangelism must be dialogical in method. Dialogue "along the way" is the essential catalyst for discerning Theopraxis, providing the means of forming a practical theology and understanding its implications for spreading the Gospel. Developing a dynamic dialogue with the various "texts" used by those both in and outside the church, i.e., biblical documents, historical traditions, narrative accounts, political practices, generational characteristics and contemporary scholarly literature, is a purposeful activity and one of the key aspects of the correlational approach. This is described as a "play between question and text,"[15] and the dynamics of this conversation, including descriptions of the various participants, the role of the Spirit, the faith community, and the question of authority in the discussion, all impinge on the interactions that comprise evangelism. We must seek, on a continual and communal basis, significant dialogue not only with the Creator who wishes to transform every facet of the process, but also with those outside the community of faith. Only in this way can they too, share in God's invitation to partake of the truth of the gospel.[16]

Secondly, a thorough investigation of the scriptures will provide a biblical basis for the spiritual journey paradigm. The Old Testament, with its description of both the literal and metaphorical journey of Abraham, its extensive vocabulary of travel, the significant role *Heilsgeschichte* plays for Israel, the paradigm offered in the Exodus event, the future hope promised in the major prophets, and the pronounced place of the journey motif within the wisdom literature, to name a few examples, offers a rich source of potential study and insight for pastoral leaders desiring a significant dialogue with the Hebrew texts.

Furthermore, the New Testament is replete with journey metaphors depicting the quest for spiritual truth as a fundamental component of human life.[17] The lexical data also reveals the prominent place of the pilgrim motif in the NT documents. The recurrence of the formulaic *the way* (η οοοζ), and the use of *race* (‘ αγωv) in Paul, serve as literary signals to the journey metaphors embodied in the NT writings. The response to God's initiative in

seeking after the lost is a "walk of faith," seen as a dual turning to God in faith concerning his promises, and from a sinful world where the sojourners are both strange and alien. The context for all this is a pilgrimage of faith which involves continual perseverance along The Way.

Third, the spiritual dimension of the conversion process needs to be explored. Through the three stages of quest, encounter, and transformation the Holy Spirit interacts with humans to effect what is known as Christian conversion.[18] Because conversion is as complex and varied as the personalities of each individual and the intricacies of the Spirit's interactions within that human life, it must be tacitly assumed that there is no monolithic paradigm that can claim universal application to every conversion experience.

Nevertheless, I believe the three phases provide a structure to explain the manner of the Holy Spirit's workings. The first phase involves a spiritual quest upon which every human embarks; as people ponder their reason for existence, a consciousness of separateness emerges in the human heart. The second aspect of spiritual encounter is an explicit experience of the incarnation, power, and ongoing presence of the risen Lord which accomplishes reconciliation between God and humanity. Finally, this movement entails a progressive spiritual transformation, embodied in the processes of sanctification and of salvation as movement toward a specific destiny.[19]

Recognizing the spiritual dimension necessitates that ordinary Christians be trained to discern the work of God in their midst. In addition to adequate theological preparation, a heartfelt reliance on the Spirit of God will enable persons to accomplish the enigmatic and complicated task of winning the lost. By centering on God as the evangelist, they can more accurately understand the gifting of the Spirit to them as individuals who will be used by him to engage unbelievers along their spiritual journey and encourage them to take one step closer to Christ.[20]

Fourth, the communal context of conversion needs to be highlighted and understood. The Messianic community, a community of loving wholeness, counters the effects of loneliness, isolation, and separation so prevalent within the contemporary culture. It does so by reconciling persons back into genuine communal relationship with God and each other. Because the very essence of God's existence is communal, any relationship with him must be seen in the context of community. For this reason, all conversion, which is essentially the restoration of a severed relationship with the Triune Godhead, fundamentally occurs in a communal context. The community of faith is inextricably indebted to the dynamic of the Trinity for its life source and direction, for apart from God it can do nothing (Jn.15: 1-6).

Furthermore, the messianic community is by definition an exceptional community that is thoroughly Christological, that is, directed **to** Christ and **by** Christ. This distinction constitutes the basis for all individual conversion experience and subsequent immersion into his community. In this way all conversion takes place in the context of a journey along with the messianic community of faith. The work of Christ to form the community through his atoning sacrifice, and to direct the community toward its mission of incorporating new members, is foundational to its role as God's redemptive agency in the world. A practical theology of evangelism should embrace the conviction that the messianic community is the context of all genuine Christian conversion.

Fifth, and finally, the wholistic scope of the conversion process needs to be recognized. Individuals have inestimable worth as persons destined to be whole in an eventual restoration of the image of God. This restoration takes place in the essential relationship between the inner character of the human and the personhood of God, whose interactions are expressed in a person's spiritual journey toward a specific goal.[21] As such, the people of God have a destiny of wholeness; the destination of their journey is to "dwell in the presence of God as a whole person."[22] Therefore, conversion is understood to be the process whereby wholeness is restored.

Moreover, it is wholistic in that its scope extends redemption beyond the sphere of mere individuals to include the messianic and global communities of which they are a part. Thus the purpose of the spiritual journey and the fruit of Theopraxis is to recognize and assist God's work in the midst of **all** creation to restore wholeness to every aspect of its existence.

Implications for Evangelism

I have tried to provide pastors, teachers, and other leaders in evangelism with a model for developing an effective Practical Theology of Evangelism for their context. By using the four interactive phases (description, dialogue, intention, and application) as a teaching structure, they will be well on their way toward the development and implementation of this theology. I make no specific assertions concerning methods, as they rightly emerge from the concrete intentions that are formulated from the ensuing dialogue within each local context. Once sensibly applied, they can be critiqued and evaluated, evoking a whole new dilemma for the process to be again. Furthermore, the five aspects of evangelism that I propose are purposively meant to be "grist for the mill," so to speak. They will provide structure, as well as provocative content, for the inception and continuation of an ongoing dialogue with those in, and outside, the church. Such a Practical Theology will, I pray,

facilitate movement toward the restoration of a lifestyle of involvement in the vital ministry we call evangelism.

This article represents a brief synopsis of the author's Ph.D. dissertation, *Toward a Practical Theology of Evangelism: Spiritual Journey as an Essential Paradigm for the Conversion Process and Its Implications for Evangelism Methodologies*, submitted in the Spring of 1999 to Fuller Theological Seminary.

NOTES

[1]Green has noted how lay persons were the key to the spread of Christianity as they went about "gossiping" the gospel in their everyday tasks (cf., Acts 5:20-21, 42), Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Guildford, Surrey: Eagle, 1970), 211.

[2]For a thorough discussion of this premise see Brian J. Kelly, *Toward a Practical Theology of Evangelism: Spiritual Journey as an Essential Paradigm for the Conversion Process and Its Implications for Evangelism Methodologies* (Pasadena: Ph.D. Dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1999).

[3]The author's methodology is significantly shaped by Browning's basic structure of practical theology, see Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 58. Also by David Tracy's "revised correlational method," see David Tracy, "Practical Theology in the Situation of Global Pluralism," in *Formation and Reflection: The Promise of Practical Theology* ed. Lewis S. Mudge, and James N. Poling, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 139. Critical correlation is "a corporate act of a well-led community of faith that moves from insights and clarifications to decisions and actions which help define along the way what this faith community is to be in the midst of the world," Ibid., xxix.

[4]*Theopraxis* is, simply stated, *the intentional activity of God in the midst of situations*. Groome called this a "shared Christian praxis," whereby God's self-disclosure can be discerned through a "participative and dialogical pedagogy," in which people learn to reflect on their own "historical agency in time and place" and on their own "socio-cultural reality." See Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: The Way of Shared Praxis* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 135. The Theopraxis envisioned here has a dual dimension, that of the human coming to know, and recognize the work of God, even as he or she is known by the divine, and recognized by him. For a

thorough discussion of this concept see Chapter Four, Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We are Known: A Spirituality of Education* (San Francisco: Harper Row Publishers, 1983).

[5]The complete report is entitled *Statistical Relationships: Conversion Story and Evangelism*, yet to be published in whole, but portions are contained in Kelly, *Toward a Practical Theology of Evangelism*, Chapter III.C.4., 55-99. The Unconscious category is the label given to those who "have known the Lord all their lives," that is, there has never been a time in their life when they were conscious of not knowing the Lord.

[6]Cf. Edwin Diller Starbuck, "A Study of Conversion," in *The American Journal of Psychology*, Vol.8, (1897), 270f.; Elmer T. Clark, *The Psychology of Religious Awakening* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1928), 48, 86-87; Gordon W. Allport, *The Individual and His Religion: A Psychological Interpretation* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1950), 33-35; Walter Houston Clark, *The Psychology of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1958), 213-214; Geoffrey E. W. Scobie, *Psychology of Religion* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1975), 50-51; Christine Liu, "Becoming a Christian Consciously Versus Nonconsciously," in *Journal of Psychology and Theology, Vol. 19 No. 4,* (1991), 368.

[7]The four are prayer, reading the Bible, sharing faith, and Christian fellowship.

[8]Not only was the idea of evangelism less important, but nearly two-thirds (64.2%) of those who responded indicated they had shared their faith only 3 times or less in the last year, 12.7% not at all. Such a low amount of sharing faith, based on self-reporting, hardly indicates a "life-style" of evangelism.

[9]This is a problem endemic to the whole discipline of evangelism. The lack of accepted definitions add to the confusion when discussing methods, theology, and many other aspects of evangelism, i.e.,; differences between "relational," "friendship" and "intentional" evangelism.

[10]Such pragmatism is nearly always based on the number of conversions that took place as a result of the methodology. Yet, there is no normative definition of what conversion really entails, i.e., number of baptisms, new members, altar consultations, and church attendance. Nor has the negative impact of certain evangelistic methods on people's faith journeys been assessed.

[11]Two books deal with this issue in depth; Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education.* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983); and Edward Farley, *The Fragility of Knowledge: Theological Education in the Church and the University,* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).

12Farley, *Fragility*, 97.

[13]I am deeply indebted here to my mentor, Richard Peace, for his model of the conversion process as a pilgrimage that involves these three stages. For a detailed description of this concept see the forthcoming Richard V. Peace, *Conversion Paradigms in the New Testament: The Conversion of Paul and the Twelve*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns Publishing Co., 1999), also see Johnson (one of Peace's students) and Maloney's, "Dynamic Sequence of Events in Conversion" which involves three stages: growing awareness, consideration, and incorporation. In their model, a "point of realization" and a "point of encounter" separate the three stages respectively, Cedric B. Johnson and H. Newton Maloney, *Christian Conversion: Biblical and Psychological Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 23f.

[14]For a comprehensive discussion of each aspect see Kelly, *op. cit.*

[15]For Browning it is "a to-and-fro process of questioning the text, listening to the text, and being questioned by the text," see, Browning, 213.

[16]This is true because all theology, as knowledge of the Truth, is essentially a dialogue between the Knower and the known, and takes place within community. As Palmer contends, "to know the truth is to enter with our whole persons into relations of mutuality with the entire creation--relations in which we not only know, but allow ourselves to be known," Palmer, 54.

[17]The cultural milieu of first century Palestine, the numerous examples of spiritual seekers, the vocabulary of seeking, Paul's missionary journeys, and the journeying of the people of God in the book of Hebrews are just a few examples of the prevalence of this motif in the NT. See Kelly, *op cit.*, 143f.

[18]Christian conversion can best be defined as a life-long process of transformation in which the God of the Universe reconciles individuals, and all of creation, back into redemptive relationship with Himself through the atonement of his Son's death

on the cross and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit toward the final completion of all things.

[19]For this model each phase is seen as epigenetic, the individual cannot move to an advanced phase without experiencing the preceding ones. Jn. 16:8-11 describes this process, see Kelly, *op. cit.*, 206-259.

[20]Some are gifted in ways that speak to the "quest" phase of the process, showing aptitude for hospitality, apologetics, philosophical insight, etc.; while others are comfortable with "encounter" experiences, which involve praying publicly, inviting, worshiping, and calling for repentance; still others feel empowered to help with ongoing "transformation," by leading Bible studies, teaching classes, or meeting one-on-one with new believers.

[21]"For the Christian, the journey is much more inward, involving growth in his perceptions, his relationships, and his actions--in short, growth in his whole life," Richard V. Peace, *Pilgrimage: A Handbook on Christian Growth* (Pasadena: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1996), 18.

[22]Ibid., 23.

EVANGELISM WITH THE POSTMODERN GENERATIONS

Todd Hahn

It is big business and savvy marketing to talk much about Generation X and the Millennial Generation these days. As is usually the case, the church is behind the curve of the culture approximately five years and is just beginning to grapple with Generation X at the very moment when that much-maligned generation is about to be elbowed off the stage by the twice-as-numerous Millennials. Our question is not how to market to these first two postmodern generations, but how to reach them and to disciple them - in particular, how to develop them as leaders for church and culture.

The Main Difference

At the beginning of our discussion, we must take into account what we call these two groups, which span in age from birth to their early thirties. I contend that it is most helpful and accurate to think of the generations together. For most of the balance of this paper, then, I will refer to the age group in question as "postmoderns."

There are differences between Xers and Millennials, to be sure. There are half as many baby bust Xers as there are Millennials. Xers are noted for their cynicism and despair, while Millennials are viewed as happy go lucky; the seminal rock band for Xers was the nihilistic Nirvana, while Millennials dance to the bubble gum pop of Hanson. Xers speak a dismissive"whatever" to big issues of culture and public policy and Millennials are known to be earnestly engaged in political issues and given to idealism.

Many of these differences can be attributed to the ways children were viewed in the culture during the adolescence of Xers and Millennials. Xers came of age in the 1970's, the Me Generation when parents were told to put their needs and aspirations above the needs of their children, a time when movies about children tended to have "devil child" themes (i.e. *The Omen* and *Rosemary's Baby*). "My parents. Their things are always more important than my things. I'll just have to accept that," said one teenage Xer upon returning home from Girls' Probation House in Virginia.[1]

The noted 1970's book *Ourselves and Our Children* (a revealing title, to say the least) advanced the culturally appealing

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argument that "consider yourself" was the ultimate commandment of parenting. Benefiting one's children, while important perhaps, was not necessarily the first motivation.

Millennials, on the other hand, are coming of age in a time when children are valued and cherished, when Marian Wright Edelman speaks with passion and conviction about the needs of children, Hillary Clinton reminds us that it takes a village working together to raise a child, and politicians know that they need to make the case that their public policy views help, not hurt children.

The Real Commonality

For all their differences, however, Xers and Millennials have one overriding thing in common: they are the first two postmodern generations, the first two generations raised in a time where the assumptions of the Enlightenment were up for grabs.

It is nearly as trendy to talk about postmodernism as it is to talk about Xers and Millennials but, for that, it is no less important. While it may be too much to say that we are going through a cultural revolution greater than any in the last 1,000 years, it is not an overstatement to say that Xers, Millennials, and all generations born since the 1960's will inhabit a vastly different world than their predecessors.

It is a world where "the monolithic sensibility of modernism, which seemed to have an unlimited potential, has fragmented into diverse and competing communities. People can no longer understand each other. There are no common reference points, no common language. Totalitarian unity has given way to chaotic diversity."[2]

The shattering year of 1989, when so much that had been taken for granted was swept away, may well go down in history as the crux of the twentieth century, the moment when things held in common by all -progress, order, rationality, and faith in autonomous science and technology - crumbled like an old wall.

For this reason, Boomers, Builders, and GI's have much more in common with one another than with Xers and Millennials. The fabled generation gap of the 1960's between Boomers and their parents turns out to be a shallow ditch compared to the experience, worldview, and assumption chasm between the first two postmodern generations and those who have gone before. So, how will we reach, disciple and develop leaders from the postmodern generations?

Evangelism With Postmodern People

It has become axiomatic to say that to be a Christian in North America is now to be a missionary. This is true, particularly in a

postmodern era where cultural assumptions largely favorable to the Christian worldview have been lost. In novelist Douglas Coupland's words: "You (postmoderns) are the first generation raised without religion."[3] For this reason, evangelism with the postmodern generations will be a mission enterprise, and we will draw on missiological categories to explore how to reach Xers and Millennials.

First, a brief survey of methods being used in the field currently. Approaches range from retro-60's coffeehouses to churches in bars to the high energy, emotionally intense approach of Teen Mania to seeker-oriented approaches adjusted for postmoderns to hybrid styles involving liturgy, incense, and techno music. As we would expect in the choice-saturated postmodern world, there is no dominant form of evangelism which will reach the radically diverse postmodern cohort. However, the most effective approaches share some common themes beyond the given theological integrity and faithfulness.

Immersion and Identification

Postmoderns are coming of age in a world where virtually all culture is pop culture. An immersion in the pop culture of postmodernity is essential for effective communication of the gospel. This immersion is made more difficult by the fact that the pop culture has a dizzying variety of expressions.

Postmodern pop culture includes fashion, MTV, *Pop-Up Videos*, Xtreme Games, *The Real World* and *Road Rules*, alternative rock, ska and retro-swing music, hip hop, a fascination with alternative religions and diverse forms of spirituality, and a recurrent nostalgia for the 70's. One of the more interesting phenomena of postmodern pop culture has been the wholesale identification of postmoderns with African-American culture and music, an emphasis losing its luster as the rap music community self-destructs.

To reach postmoderns is to understand these cultural expressions and, more importantly, what they represent. Immersion leads to identification, the ability to maneuver in the postmodern environment with skill and grace. At some level, it requires liking postmodern culture, a gap too big for many Boomers and Builders. More serious is that many Boomers and Builders find themselves unable to grasp the implications of postmodernity for truth claims and how that must shape our presentation of the gospel. It can be just too difficult to move into the postmodern environment and to speak in a way that makes sense.

On the level of epistemology, postmoderns are comfortable with contradiction and paradox. It is not unusual to meet a postmodern student who accepts the deity and resurrection of Christ

but is also a practicing Buddhist. The rock star Bono of U2 summed up the zeitgeist well when he said: "Our generation loves to hold one charged pole in one hand, and its opposite in the other, and let the current course through our bodies." Contradiction is not something to be feared, it is to be embraced and celebrated. This means that the apologetic task will have to be revisioned, as we will discuss later. It is not too much to say that a critical need at this point is a recontextualization of the gospel for the postmodern era.

The principles of immersion and identification apply to the issues of pop culture and truth claims, but they go deeper than this. Central to the postmodern experience is disconnection, relational pain, and a sense of rootlessness, the sense of being "homesick for a home I never had," to quote lyrics of the band Soul Asylum.

We are committed to immersion and identification, of course, because Jesus demonstrated the ultimate form of immersion and identification in his incarnation. And it is precisely incarnational evangelism that bears the most fruit in this and any culture. John A. Sims is to the point: "...the Gospel truth that postmoderns need to hear is not that God is 'for us' in some abstract, impersonal way, but that in Jesus of Nazareth God is personally with us in the community of faith."[4]

The effective evangelist to postmoderns will need to be able to navigate the waters of postmodern life, own some of its dominant emotions, and be able to contextualize the gospel in ways that resonate with the culture. This will require going beyond modes of contextualization that have served the church well, such as emphasis on Christianity's ability to relieve personal guilt and shame and to lead to a fulfilling life.

In brief, the key question for pre-Boomers about the Christian faith was "Is it true?", for Boomers it was "Does this work?" and for postmoderns it is "Does this make sense of my world and my experiences, especially my experiences of loss and relational brokenness?"

The Primacy of Relationships

In a postmodern context which has lost an overarching story that gives meaning to all our lives, the most likely substitute is individualized stories and stories confined to small, balkanized communities. While hailed as liberating by proponents of ideological postmodernism, the death of metanarrative actually results in individual alienation and loss of connection from others. To be adrift in a postmodern world is to be hungry for real, lasting relationships.

Again, popular culture provides us insights into postmodern loneliness. Television shows targeted at postmodern people (i.e. *Beverly Hills 90210, Melrose Place*, and *Friends* for Xers; *Dawson's Creek* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* for Millennials)

often feature a group of young people doing their best to move through life with minimal help from parents or other authority figures. Their lives are lived in a sort of community, defined by shared histories, danger, and in-jokes, as well as a common take on life. The communities are often dysfunctional and shallow, but nevertheless provide the relational glue which holds the characters' lives together.

But pseudo-community will not long substitute for the real thing. The hunger for community present in the hearts of postmoderns does not mean that they will find true and real relational connection. Any apologetic for postmoderns, any evangelistic method which will reach the first generations raised without religion, will have the promise and the practice of relational integrity at its center.

Community may provide the biblical/cultural point of connection which will help us most to reach postmodern people. In our discussion below of operating values for evangelism to postmoderns, we will trace out a bit more some of the implications of this for evangelistic thinking and ministry.

A Process of Change

Astute thinkers about and practitioners of evangelism in the North American context have long recognized the strategic importance of seeing conversion as a process not lightly embarked upon. If it takes the average North American weeks to arrive at a decision about which new vehicle to purchase, we note, it will most likely take her longer to decide whether or not to hand her life, hopes and dreams over to God in Christ. While recognizing that God the Spirit can move to regenerate a heart as quickly as he chooses, we recognize that he brings a person to the point of conviction, repentance, and acceptance of God's offer of full life in incremental stages.

If this is the case with Boomers, it will be so all the more for postmoderns, who are used to a world filled with a bewildering array of choices and who are skeptical of any claim to absolute truth or metanarrative viability. The first generations raised without religion have very little familiarity with the symbols, terms, and basic assumptions of the faith; more time will be required for them to comprehend, let alone accept the gospel.

Effective evangelistic ministry in a postmodern context creates structures and opportunities for processing truth and the implications of the gospel for one's life. Methods which demand a quick response will have less and less of a hearing, while methods which honor the individual's attempt to come to terms with Christ's claims and express questions and doubts will have more and more effectiveness. This does not mean that "event" evangelism will be out of bounds. It does mean that event evangelism can never stand

alone outside of the context of a process of coming to faith, most likely in the context of relationships.

Driven By Values

Evangelism is a risky, tricky enterprise in a postmodern context. There will be a temptation to latch onto faddish methods to try and keep up with a rapidly changing culture, and the danger that the message of the gospel will be negatively transformed as well as positively translated.[5]

It is important, then, to establish some clear values for evangelistic ministry to postmoderns. The values must have integrity both theologically and pastorally. And they must be flexible, allowing for a variety of approaches in a variety of contexts. To borrow a term from the marketplace, they must be operating values which transcend local particularities and can be owned by all who desire to reach postmoderns with the gospel, regardless of the individual personality of the evangelist or the ministry. There are three operating values we will consider: creation, covenant, and community.[6]

Creation

Evangelism, especially the narrative evangelism necessary in the postmodern era, involves telling the Christian Story, and any telling of that Story must begin with the beginning of the beginning - God's creation of the universe ex nihilo. From nothing, the Creator shaped all that is and pronounced it good. It was good because he made it, because it shared in something of his essence.

At the pinnacle of creation was humanity, bearing God's image and able to relate to him personally. All of the promise of this crown of creation was shattered by the Fall, a dark twist in the Story in which the players made devastating decisions and paid a devastating price.

The Hero of the Story entered, however, and in by his life, death, and resurrection began putting back together the things that had been torn apart, making reconciliation possible and scattering hope like precious jewels. This is what God is doing now: bringing hope to the hopeless, connection to the disconnection, and life to the barely living. He is restoring the promise of the Creation.

Creation is vital for evangelism to postmoderns because it touches on so much of what it means to be human, and because the good things inherent in the doctrine of creation are so sullied and obscured in our time. In this century, we have abdicated our responsibility to be stewards of creation like never before. Two of the enshrined values of modernity are industrialization and technocratization. As these have been given pride of place, we have

raped and shattered our environment, and we are now seeing the effects of that.

On a more individual scale, the biblical promise of recreation resonates with postmoderns. We know that we are broken and disconnected. We don't so much long to have our sins wiped away (an older impulse touched so powerfully by the early ministry of Billy Graham) as we long to have everything wiped away and to start over again. This is very close to what the Bible actually promises us. The promise is that our old life can be torn down and God can create a new life in its place; God can and will give us a new heart just for the asking.

The doctrine of creation provides a point of contact both globally and personally. Postmoderns consistently report that the environment is among the most significant public policy issues for them. The biblical doctrine of creation stewardship gives the only ultimately plausible rationale for being a committed environmentalist. Certainly, this is an important apologetic and evangelistic starting point. And postmoderns crave a new life to replace their broken lives, even if they can't articulate this desire in theological terms. The message of new hope and a new creation resonates deeply with these generations.

Covenant

The postmodern generations, particularly Generation X, are used to having promises to them broken. Generation X's parents divorced at a much greater rate than any generation previously; they were also the most aborted generation. Coming of age in the 70's and 80's was to live through a rapid succession of broken promises, on the political, educational, and even religious fronts. As a result, this is a generation sensitive to spin, marketing, and hype, cynical to a fault.

But postmodern people hope against hope to find something to believe in. "Help me to believe in anything...I want to be someone to believe" sings the Counting Crows' Adam Durwitz. They just don't know if anything out there can be believed.

This is where the concept of covenant can be such a powerful apologetic. God has always dealt with people through covenants, arrangements where he lays his name and honor on the line. He has never failed to live up to his covenant promises. We see this most clearly in the New Covenant, where Christ not only kept God's promises but paid the price for our own covenant-breaking. God has an unblemished record of keeping his promises, and we need to make sure to proclaim this with conviction.

Those who live under the New Covenant are expected to mimic the integrity of the covenant-Maker by being people of promise and wholeness as well. This is an embodied apologetic, best seen in the context of a covenant making and keeping

community. The witness of the integrous community, combined with the revelation of a God of perfect integrity, has the potential to reach postmoderns with breathtaking force.

Community

Perhaps the single most important insight about postmoderns for evangelism is that they are often converted to community before they are converted to Christ. In other words, the process of conversion often includes initiation into a community of Christ-followers, inclusion in their life together, socially and even in their religious rites, prior to a personal commitment of faith. Many observers of postmoderns have observed that they tend to reach moral conclusions as a group rather than as individuals. This is no less true for faith conclusions.

Jesus came not primarily to save individual souls but to create a new community made up of people being reconciled to him and to each other. Community is God's fondest, best dream for people. We become who we are meant to be as we experience life in the new community brought together by God's grace in Christ.

This is community with a theological center, to be sure. The culture is full of idealistic dreams of community which lack a common core. The life of Christ defines and enlivens our experience of community now, which is a foretaste of the perfectly reconciled heavenly community.

Community is our most potent force for reaching postmoderns with the gospel. We ought to come to grips with the pervasive biblical emphasis on community, incarnate it in our lives, examine our own experiences of community, and offer rich, diverse, Christ-centered experiences of community to postmodern people.

An implication of this is that the community at worship is a powerful evangelistic witness. The seeker-targeted approach of some churches, so effective with Boomers, is less helpful for postmoderns, who see less need to distinguish between the sacred and the secular. Authentic worship in the vernacular, with an emphasis on hospitality and welcoming the outsider - worship which allows an introductory experience with God that is not strange or alienating - will be indispensable for evangelism with postmoderns.

There is much work to be done here, theologically and in praxis. But there is no more important work. To the extent that the North American church is able to recapture and live out the biblical emphasis of authentic community (its most notable expression given in Acts 2:41-47) it will succeed or fail in its quest to reach the first two postmodern generations.

Conclusion

The evangelistic enterprise in North America will require both revisioning and recontextualization if it is to succeed in reaching postmodern people. The helpful aids of the past- crusade evangelism, Evangelism Explosion, contact evangelism, the Four Spiritual Laws, seeker services, evidential apologetics and the like - must be honored and still utilized, selectively.

But we must have the courage to move ahead and embrace new methods of evangelism appropriate in the postmodern context. Evangelism that is based on the missiological values of immersion and identification, that is deeply relational, that allows for a process of initiation into conversion, and that is driven by the operating values of creation, covenant, and community, can point us forward to a powerful and effectual reengagement with our host culture.

NOTES

[1]Neil Howe and Bill Strauss, *13th Gen* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 55.

[2]Gene E. Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1994), 21.

[3]Douglas Coupland, *Life After God* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), from the dust jacket.

[4]David S. Dockery, ed., *The Challenge of Postmodernism* (Wheaton: Victor, 1995), 334.

[5]See Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 113-116.

[6]See Todd Hahn and David Verhaagen, *Reckless Hope: Understanding and Reaching Baby Busters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 110-123.

EVANGELISM WITH THE POSTMODERN GENERATIONS: A RESPONSE

Ronald K. Crandall

There is no question that the topic of how to reach our newest postmodern generations is critical to the task of evangelism. As the father of two sons who identify with their generation's values and perspectives in a way that still seems foreign to "dad," I am doubly interested in this subject. Nevertheless, although I have a deep interest in the subject, and have done some reading here, I am by no means an expert on "Postmodernism" or "Xers" or "Millennials." I am rather deeply indebted to persons like Todd Hahn, Kevin Ford and my own students who are making the commitment to help the church learn how best to be faithful to the great commission in the context of today's new generations. Indeed, as Todd rightly asserts, "an immersion in the pop culture of postmodernity is essential for effective communication of the gospel." Sometimes I just feel too old. Lord help me.

I appreciate the challenge Todd faced in trying to present such a complex subject in a short paper. The content and structure of the presentation are relatively easy to follow; and therefore, the questions and comments I offer are mostly designed to help clarify some of the points Todd makes, and occasionally to suggest additional resources.

First, if Millennials have indeed grown up in families and a society with a much more positive attitude toward children than was the case with Xers, I find it difficult to understand why "central to the postmodern experience is disconnection, relational pain, and a sense of rootlessness." My own observations confirm a growing number of troubled, abandoned, jostled, undisciplined and even violent children. Children killing children seems to be one of the major themes emerging in recent years. In what ways is society more positive toward children? Why are we then still producing children "homesick for home I never had"?

Second, your emphasis on the primacy of relationships and community makes me wonder if it isn't time for us to take another look at the differences between the Roman and the Celtic approaches to Christian mission and evangelization. My colleague, George Hunter, is currently exploring these differences and intends to offer us a new book affirming much of the Celtic model with its emphasis on contagious Christianity caught in the community rather than simply decided upon as an announcement of truth. Several other

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themes of the postmodern world seem to resonate with the Celtic way: a deep appreciation of creation and the natural world, a celebration of the arts as gifts from God, a readiness to acknowledge the role of women as guides on the way, and an ability to indigenize the gospel to the people rather than requiring cultural as well as Christian conversion. I believe Catholic and Orthodox theologies have paid more attention to some of these matters than have evangelical Protestants. Maybe it's time to open the floor more in our theological discussions as we plan our evangelistic strategies.

One brief illustration of the challenge might help. I was recently talking to one of our graduates serving a conservative, evangelical church in Arizona. The church says it wants to reach more of this new generation. The pastor is likewise evangelistic, but also sensitive to the new methods needed for this postmodern generation. He has become the only Christian "Wilderness Guide" in Arizona. A wilderness guide is a certified mentor for persons who would like to explore finding themselves, their way, their path, their vision, their God through personal and isolated pilgrimages into the desert. The role of the guide is to prepare the pilgrims and assist in debriefing them upon their return. He believes this is a wonderful evangelistic opportunity aimed at seekers after God (especially contextual to Arizona), but his congregation thinks it might be associating with the demonic. Likewise, his wife leads yoga classes and looks for opportunities to talk about Jesus as the ultimate Shalom with those seeking wholeness. Do we evangelicals need to stretch our perceptions of how to be co-laborers with God?

Third, staying with the "creation" and "community" themes for just a little longer, would our theology benefit from describing the new covenant more like Paul does in 2 Corinthians 3 and 5 than like a "plan of salvation"? Of course there is a "plan," but the invitation is not merely to faith, but through faith to a "new creation." The new covenant is "of the Spirit who gives life" not of a "code that kills" (2 Corinthians 3:6). And in this Spirit "there is liberty" and we all are being changed "from one degree of glory to another, into his (Christ's) likeness" (3:17-18). I think we are sometimes too shy about the role and presence of the Holy Spirit in creating authentic Christian community and in transformational conversion.

I first became profoundly aware of this powerful "new covenant" image while wandering around outside Kobo Hall in Detroit. A marvelous sculpture caught my eye. A golden human figure holds in one hand a dynamic celebration of the family—mother, father, child lifting holy hands and one another toward heaven. In his other hand the sculptured figure holds the globes of creation. I was deeply touched by the beauty and meaning of the art. Then I read the inscription on the marble behind the sculpture: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17)." Are there new (yet true) symbols and biblical images we

need to draw on as we seek the best ways to communicate the gospel to the generations of this age?

Fourth, your emphasis on "a process of change" reminds me of what we Methodists learned a few years ago through the research of Tom Albin. In reviewing the diaries and journals of more than 500 early Methodists, Albin discovered that these converts on average took almost 2.5 years after entering the movement to come to the deep personal experience of new birth and regeneration. John and Charles Wesley and their roving teams of evangelists understood that the timing of God is not in their hands. They did not primarily seek to "convert" their hearers on the spot, so much as to "awaken" them to the possibilities before them and invite them to join a "society" of others seeking after heaven and longing for the saving power of God's divine love to transform them in Christ. Each one committed to being part of a small "class" of about 12 persons who met weekly to hold each other accountable and support one another in Christian love. In this kind of community, the gospel took root until in the unique timing needed for each individual soul, the light dawned, the Spirit spoke, and growing faith became connected to experience. On average 2.5 years of such "marinating" in grace were needed to produce the kinds of Christians that transformed England. Maybe another look at the strategies and theology of the Wesleyan renewal movement could help us today. Likewise, a more careful examination of such programs as Cursillo/Emmaus, Experiencing God, Christianity Explained, Promise Keepers, and the Alpha program might reveal additional insights for our efforts at faithful and informed evangelism.

Fifth, I wonder what you have in mind as the relationship between "covenant" and "community." I tend to see them as belonging together—"covenant community." Could you explain more fully in accordance with your model how these two critical ingredients relate to one another.

Finally, the model you offer seems to have tremendous implications for at least two areas: worship and theological/ministry education. With regard to worship, many local churches and whole denominations hoping to reach these new generations may need to rethink and retool their approach to worship in order to value both the "people's vernacular" and to offer a serious invitation to join us for "an experience with God." We need conversations with people like Sally Morgenthaler whose book *Worship Evangelism* tries to take both subjects seriously. And with regard to theological/ministry education, I only ask if we ourselves who are part of this academy are willing to keep learning in order that we might help educate "missionary-evangelists" for today's real world rather than for another which we might prefer? Personally, I don't like that last question. It sounds like work. It might even mean I would have to change my lectures, offer new classes, or alter my whole approach to teaching. But if this isn't the work I love, and the work to which

I have been called, why not retire now? Lord help me, and all of us, to be faithful. Thanks Todd, for stirring the pot.

EVANGELISM OF, WITH, AND BY SENIOR ADULTS

Derrel R. Watkins

Seminary classes are not always cynical. Some subjects, however, seem to draw out the cynic in contemporary students. Take, for example, the discussion of church growth possibilities in an urban neighborhood that is populated by persons whose average age is 61. I can hear some students saying, "Yeah. Right!" with a cynical laugh. It seems to me that there is also a silent cynicism in the absence of teaching about the evangelization of older adults in the literature on missions, evangelism, and church growth. If Win and Charles Arn had not written their book, *Catch The Age Wave*, there would be almost no literature on the evangelization of senior adults. It is now out of print.

As I prepared to write this article I looked for any literature in print that would speak to the subject. No wonder most evangelism courses in seminaries and theological schools do not include sharing the Gospel with older adults. Very few of us have taken the subject seriously enough to write about it.

New Testament Evangelism Is An Inclusive Process

According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke the final imperative command of Jesus to all believers is to go into the entire world and make disciples of everyone (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 1:8). There is no limitation regarding race, nationality, gender, or age. The Gospel is absolutely inclusive. It includes heterosexuals and homosexuals; males and females; red, yellow, black, brown, and white persons; persons from all nationalities and cultures; children, youth, young adults, median adults, and senior adults. It is this last age group I wish to address.

Strangely, there seems to be a resistance to talking about older adults and evangelism. Some authors may mention the need to understand the older generations but there does not seem to be a lot of energy directed toward sharing the gospel with them. Take, for example, Gary L. McIntosh's book, *Three Generations* in which he identifies three contemporary generations that he labels "Builders," "Boomers," and "Busters." It is a very helpful book, but there is one glaring omission: he does not have a chapter on evangelizing the "Elderly Builders." He does have a chapter on reaching "boomers" and another on reaching "busters."[1] In the same vein, there seems

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to be a resistance to thinking of older adults as potential evangelists. Little is written about training older persons to become members of evangelism teams reaching out to their communities or to beginning new congregations.

Resistance Based On Errors of Attribution

Limiting the practice of evangelism and education for evangelism to the young is, perhaps, one of the most damaging legacies of the *industrial age*. The assumption that persons lose their value in the church and community because they are over 65 is probably a holdover from that age. Win and Charles Arn suggest that this attitude did not become dominant until after World War II.[2] Why is this? It perhaps derives its impetus from the time when society moved from a mostly agrarian based economy to a mostly industrial economy.[3] Since industry required the strength of youth to sustain its high level of productivity, older persons in the labor force were seen as a liability rather than a valuable resource. Slowly, all facets of society adopted industry's valuation of older persons. Even the churches assumed that if persons were no longer capable of producing at a high level, they should step aside and let younger persons take over. Of course, there were always exceptions.

Social psychology suggests that human societies tend to engage in what is labeled "errors of attribution." This concept refers to the tendency of groups to make wholesale assumptions about other groups based upon limited knowledge. Knowing a person's age, for example, may lead the average observer to erroneously assume a number of attitudes, valuations, and tendencies that are not necessarily true. Decisions are often made, however, based upon those false perceptions.

Knowing that a group of persons is over 65 years of age might suggest that they have the same likes and desires of other 65 year-olds we have known. That could be an "attribution error." The senior adult span covers over fifty years (from 65-118). There are a number of age cohorts within this group and there is a tremendous degree of diversity among them. Simply knowing the age range of a group does not suggest that one can know for certain how they will react to anything. Take, for example, the experience of a minister of music who asked a group of senior adults at a conference to select three titles from a list of hymns they would like to sing. Half of the hymns and choruses on the list had been written since 1960; the other half were traditional ones written in the 19th and early 20th century. He assumed that these persons, who were born between 1915 and 1930, would choose those written prior to 1960. He was wrong. A majority chose hymns and choruses that were more contemporary.

Attribution errors can be positive as well as negative. I have often assumed that I understood the positive desires and preferences of certain age groups only to discover that I had made an attribution error. While working with a "Community Missions Committee" in an inner-city church, I assumed that the 71 year old member would support my desire to emphasize the evangelism of a large group of older persons in the community who were not affiliated with any church. Since he was an older person I attributed to him my positive concern for senior adults. I was wrong. He disagreed with my emphasis on the basis that "those old people have had their chance. We need to reach out to the youth." I had directed my "pitch" toward the younger members of the committee, feeling that I needed to convince them and I was unprepared for his negative attitude. The younger members were much more supportive, thus revealing another of my attribution errors.

A general attribution error by many in the field of evangelism education is that age determines readiness for response to the Gospel. Some, if not most, seem to feel that if persons have not established a salvific relationship with Christ by age 30, there is little hope that they ever will. Harold Koenig, a Duke University Medical School research professor, challenges that attribution error. In his book, *Aging and God*, Koenig concludes that a significant number of older adults are open to making "faith changes" in their later years. His research suggests that growth in faith and spirituality for older believers is a very important reality and that, actually, older persons who have not already expressed their faith in Christ, are probably more open to the possibility or responding to the Gospel than younger adults.[4]

The Evangelization of Senior Adults

The cynical student mentioned above might ask the question, "Just how great is the need?" There are several answers to that question: **First**, the fastest growing segment of the population in North America is the group over 65. Economists and other social scientists are predicting that the exploding increase in the older population is more significant than any other event in human history.[5] Former Secretary of Commerce Peter G. Peterson predicts that in just thirty years one-fourth of all the people in the developed world will be over 65.[6] As of July of 1983, there were more persons over 65 living in the United States than teenagers. While there continues to be a large number of children and teens in our churches and communities, their numbers are dwindling in comparison to the older population.

Second, a large percentage of those persons who are moving into the senior adult age group are not involved in a faith community. Researchers, such as Gallup and Barna, report that the percentage of persons involved with an organized religious group is growing smaller and smaller; at the same time, according to Naisbitt and Aburdene, a higher percentage declare that they believe in God.[7]

Third, older persons seem to have a hunger for a closer relationship with God. Jane Thibault, a clinical gerontologist, suggests that many older persons are hungry for a deeper relationship with God. She has observed that they are bored with the same old stories, sermons, etc., that they are hearing from the churches.[8] There is a readiness among many older adults for a vital relationship with the Creator. Some are even praying for it. Consider an 81 year old retired rice farmer in Forrest City, Arkansas. I was a member of an evangelistic team that visited him one day. He was sitting on his porch and seemed to be waiting for us. The minister shared the Gospel with him and answered his questions. He responded by praying and asking God to forgive him of his sins and declared his belief in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. He then told us that he had been praying that morning that somebody would come by and tell him how to "get right with God." He had been thinking about it for weeks. Recently in Florida the baptism of Joe Ramies on Easter Sunday morning made the front page of the *St. Petersburg Times*. You see, Joe was 104 years of age. When the date for his baptism was set, the pastor said Joe danced a "football shuffle" in his living room.[9]

My experience with older persons is consistent with George Hunter's model where he suggests that the most effective evangelism begins with involving persons in a fellowship that engages them in conversations that then leads to belief and commitment.[10] The 81 year old man described above had been "cultivated" by the pastor for nearly two years. Members of his family were already members of the church and he had some friends in the congregation who, along with the pastor, had visited him when he was in the hospital. Koenig's research is consistent with my own experience. It revealed that stimulus for late-life conversions vary. A number are the result of the influence of family and friends. Others come simply because the older person made a personal decision to believe, unrelated to any other event. Take, for example, Clayton Townsend of House, Mississippi. Although he knew the Bible and had been very involved in the church he did not have peace with himself or God. When, at age 90, he knelt and prayed that God would forgive him of his sins and expressed his belief in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior, he reported that he now had peace and his dreams are about heaven instead of some awful calamity.[11] Many others, however, come about as a result of a time of crisis—after a bout with alcohol, a traumatic war experience, an accident, a severe illness or some other stressful event.[12]

Evangelism With Senior Adults

There are three general barriers some older persons face when it comes to being engaged in the church's evangelistic mission: First, **they do not know** that are expected to share their witness with those who do not believe. Many older members of local churches may be willing to share their faith stories with other persons, but they are not aware that they are included in Christ's "Great Commission." Somehow they never internalized the message of the Gospels that compelled all Christians to be engaged in spreading the "Good News" to the entire world. If they heard it they thought it applied only to ministers, priests, pastors, or missionaries. The solution to this barrier is Christian education regarding the inclusiveness of the Great Commission, both for those who need to hear the Gospel and those who are supposed to share it with them. When they know that they are expected to share their stories, they may not know how. Evangelism training is very important to overcoming this barrier.

The second barrier is **ability**. Some do not witness to their faith because they, for some mental, emotional, physical, or circumstantial reason just cannot engage in the church's evangelistic programs. It is important for the church to find ways these persons can identify their gifts and understand ways they can use what God has given them to *be his witnesses*[13] as a part of the church's Great Commission vision. Sometimes this involves modifying or arranging programs, equipment, and facilities so that all persons are included.

Motivation, or the lack thereof, is the third barrier. Some persons know that the Great Commission includes them; they have the ability but they choose not to be involved. It is important church leaders of evangelism understand, as much as possible, the source of their resistance. Some are not motivated because they do not have a personal saving relationship with Christ. Their names may be on the church rolls and they may be actively involved in the church's program and administration, but they are not personally related to Christ. Others may not be motivated because they simply have not grown in their faith to the point that their relationship with God is vital and vibrant. They are spiritually empty and, perhaps, bored with the church and even God. Jane Thibault suggests to senior adults that as they grow in their "deeper love affair" with God that the natural outgrowth will be a desire to share their experience with God with everybody else. She observes that "as we grow in this awareness, at some point we will be so desirous of sharing with others, that we will also be willing to give up our lives in one way or another, if necessary, in order to be faithful to the truth of our own reality, which is life in the Reality of God."[14]

When persons resist growing in Christ and/or engaging in faith sharing, intercessory prayer for them and a consistent discipleship-type relationship with them by concerned pastors and lay leaders may be the only solution to overcoming the barrier. Prayer for persons who are not motivated to accept Christ as Lord and Savior or those who are not willing to support the evangelistic efforts of the church must not be minimized. Prayer does make a difference. It can bring about the change God wants in us and in the persons for whom we pray.

Many seminarians who are serving "student-pastorates" complain that they cannot get their churches motivated to adapt to the changing culture and adopt new worship music and styles. Their churches are dying and it seems that the people don't care. Much of the time these people are older adults. They seem to be holding on until they die and they have resigned themselves to the fact that the church will likely die with them. The old ways of doing things often fail to attract younger persons to the church. In many cases it turns them off. Many pastors assume that if older persons people the churches there is little hope of ever reviving them.

Aubrey Malphurs suggests seven principles for starting or planting growing churches: 1) A Great Commission vision; 2) A strong servant leadership; 3) a well-mobilized lay army; 4) a culturally relevant ministry; 5) a holistic, authentic worship; 6) a Biblical, culturally relevant evangelism; and 7) a robust network of small groups.[15] I have had some success in helping to lift declining churches off of the downhill slope and move upward in their quest to be the church God wants in the community. It is my hypothesis that the principles for church planting works well as principles for revitalization of older churches. In order to do so, however, we must start with a revised set of assumptions or principles. First, *church planters begin with the assumption that **God** wants a church in a particular community.* In like manner, existing churches must renew their vision that God wants a church in that particular community. No church will consistently remain alive and vital without a vision of themselves as a part of the Great Commission.

Second, after surveying the community a church planter must *determine what kind of church God wants, based upon the spiritual needs that are evident in the community.* The existing, declining church must ask the same question. "What are the needs of the people in the congregation AND in the community, and what would God have us do about them?" A few years ago, a church in a community in San Antonio, Texas was disturbed by the construction of an interstate highway through their neighborhood almost taking out their church property. Many persons who once attended the church moved to other suburbs and joined other churches. A core group of older persons remained. Their homes were still in the area. They engaged a consultant to analyze their situation and tell them

what they could do to remain a vital witness in the community. The report indicated that there were over three thousand persons living near the church building who were not members of any church in the city. Many were older persons who lived in their own homes and many others were young Latin-American families who mostly lived in rental homes. They spent the next month praying and asking God what they should do about selling their buildings or changing the focus of their ministries. One evening when a group of church leaders had met to pray, one asked God to give them a sign. At that moment they heard a noise in the street. There were about 20 Latin-American children laughing and talking as they walked from a convenience store to their neighborhood just a few blocks from the church. They decided that God was telling them that they were on mission to share the Gospel with those children and their families and that God wanted a strong church that reached out to other ethnic groups. The youngest member of that group of church leaders was 69.

The third principle is that *the pastor/priest and a lay leader share the vision and they are willing to commit themselves to doing whatever necessary to see that dream become a reality.* Starting a new church or revitalizing an older-declining one is costly. Tremendous amounts of emotional as well as physical energy will be expended before anything significant comes of the effort. It takes a great deal of courage to engage in church planting and it takes as much or more to turn around a declining church. Only under the influence and power of the Holy Spirit will it be accomplished with any degree of success.

Malphur's principle of a strong servant leadership is an essential component. Someone like Bill Hybels can go into a growing, homogeneous community and gather a group of interested persons around himself/herself who are willing to be discipled and, with the Holy Spirit's leadership, they can grow a huge congregation. It will take one other element when turning around a declining congregation: an "opinion maker" from within the congregation, i.e., someone who will step forward and pay the price for leadership along with the minister. Perhaps this was what the Apostle Peter had in mind when he quoted the prophet Joel, "...I will pour out my spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, *your old men will dream dreams.*" (Acts 2:17 NIV, emphasis mine). A young (or older) visionary pastor and an older member of the congregation who will dream of what God wants the church to be, can be used to bring about the renewal of a declining congregation.

Fourth, *persons from the existing fellowship along with new members must be enlisted and discipled/trained to form evangelism and mission teams committed to reaching their community/world for Christ.* Initially, it is not reasonable to expect that every member will support efforts for renewal. Some may even actively resist.

Through prayer and perseverance, those who are willing will see the work of the Holy Spirit overcome or remove the obstacles. God has gifted all churches with persons who have potential for sharing the Gospel with a dying world in many creative ways. Pastors and teachers have a responsibility to draw out those who are willing to use their gifts in the ministry of the church and train them for service "so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph. 4:11-12). Management expert Peter Drucker has said that the key to the success of any volunteer or corporate enterprise is training, training, and more training.[16]

The fifth principle states that for an older church to be renewed *it will be necessary that the message of the Gospel be presented in a culturally sensitive way.* Some young ministers make the mistake to trying to copy Willow Creek or Saddleback programs without evaluating them in light of the cultural setting of the church community. Both of those great churches began by targeting persons who were under 50 years of age, and they had no church history to contend with. A 100 year-old church in a small town where a large segment of the community is over 60 cannot relate to that type of culture. The culture of older persons must be considered along with the younger members of the community if there is to be a renewal of the church. Rick Warren's concept of the church that is driven by its perceived purpose is applicable, but it must be framed in light of the culture of the community and the church.[17]

Principle number six states that *the key to authentic church growth, renewal and evangelism is centered in a vital, vibrant, and biblical practice of worship.* The problem with most dying churches has less to do the selection of hymns, choruses, or praise songs than the manner in which the music, liturgy, prayer, and preaching is administered. Some of the largest and fastest growing churches in the country utilize the old hymns, organs and pianos, choir anthems, liturgies, and read from the King James Version of the Bible. Most also inject choruses and praise songs in a blend of worship music.[18] If the church perceives its community as populated by mostly young, middle-class, professionals who have little or no background in Bible study, Sunday School, or worship, the Willow Creek and Saddleback models have a lot to offer. If, on the other hand, a wide range of age cohorts populates the community, with a majority in the older age groups, another model must be utilized. In every case, worship that has "life" and authenticity is essential to evangelism and growth.

Seventh, *sharing the gospel with as many persons in the community, in as many ways as possible, is the process that drives church renewal and growth.* Essentially, anything we do in and through the church because of our love for God and what God has done for us in Christ Jesus is worship. In a like manner, anything we do or say that tells a lost and dying people that God loves them

and that Jesus Christ died for their sins is evangelism. Leading congregations to discover ways of sharing the Gospel with their family and friends is an essential practice by a pastor who wants to see the people of the church grow. Strategies, such as *oikos* evangelism may provide a useful structure for engaging a congregation in the renewal effort.[19]

Another, very basic but effective effort, is illustrated by a church near Philadelphia, Pa. The renewal of a rural church began when the pastor's wife asked members to write the name of at least one person they knew who needed a saving relationship with Christ on a card and give it to her for prayer. She then asked other members of the congregation to join her at the church each day to pray for those persons whose names appeared on the cards. In addition, she asked the persons who submitted the names to pray at a certain time each day (the time she would be in prayer, as well). The persons who joined her at the church were all older persons (60-88 years of age). They had the time and they made the commitment. That church has quadrupled in size since that day. It was declining until this process began. They have had more new members, many of them older persons, to join in the past year than they had in attendance during the first year of the pastor's ministry with the church. The pastor has trained a number of evangelism teams to reach out into the community, but he acknowledges that he could not even enlist an evangelism team until the prayer groups began.

Developing, supporting, and encouraging small groups is the eighth principle. This includes the Sunday School classes along with fellowship, study, self-help, and ministry task groups. There does not seem an end to the number of functional small groups a church can form. Traditionally, Sunday School classes for adults have been the mainstay for most growing churches. Sunday School continues to be a viable possibility, but it is important that the curriculum, scheduling, and teaching methods be adapted to changing cultural needs in the church and the community.[20] Senior Adults in Sunday School and other forms of small group activities have a history of ministering to and with others in the church and community. Southern Baptists, for example, recommend that Senior Adult Sunday School classes be organized into seven-member sub-groups. Every member is contacted by her/his sub-group leader each week. They also maintain weekly contact with the homebound and persons in nursing homes. Among their evangelistic activities is the involvement of non-members in their fellowship, encouraging them to attend Bible study and recreational activities. Those who carry out these suggestions continue to grow.

Evangelism By Senior Adults

A few years ago I was interviewed on a religious talk show. One of the panelists was an 86 year old woman who had become the first person of her age in Texas to be certified as an Evangelism Explosion instructor. She was actively involved in her church in Houston, and was now being called upon to help other churches set up EE programs in their own churches. At another event I heard the testimony of a 70 year old woman who had just returned from a foreign country where she had gone with the class in personal evangelism in which she was enrolled at Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri. She excitedly told of sharing her faith with over 100 persons and seeing 38 of them respond in belief and acceptance of Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Bob Curtis celebrated his 85th birthday in Kenya while on mission from the First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas. He personally counseled with 108 persons who publicly professed their faith in Christ as a result of his witness. He personally financed his trip to Kenya by coming out of retirement and taking a job so that he could save enough to pay his way.[21]

I conducted the funeral of a 74 year old man who had come by my office each week to tell me how many persons he was witnessing to at his used car lot. He was not bragging, he was asking me to join him in prayer for those young men. At the funeral two rows of pews were reserved by the family for persons whom he had won to Christ during the past year. I don't remember how many there were but they filled two long pews. They ranged in age from 24 to 48 years.

Personal evangelism is not the only approach that senior adults are using to share the Gospel. One of the most active is a group called "Campers On Mission." There are approximately 3,600 of them who each summer spend from a week to a month in state and national camping areas. They travel with their recreation vehicles, campers, and tents to a designated camp site. After setting up their own camp, they visit with other campers in the parks and introduce themselves to as many as possible. Each night they gather in a central location where they play musical instruments and sing campfire songs and Gospel choruses. They will invite other campers to join them for hot dogs, hamburgers, ice cream, watermelon, etc. After they have eaten, one or two of the group will share the story of their life with Jesus Christ. They do not put any pressure on people to respond, but they offer to share literature and make themselves available for counseling. Every summer, many persons hear the Gospel, and many make decisions to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior as a result of the witness of these senior adults.

Another group of retirees on mission call themselves "Kingdom Builders" or "Christian Builders." They help build or

remodel houses and church buildings for and with people and churches that are financially challenged. While they are on site, at their own expense, they work with the local church or churches to share the Gospel with persons who will gather each evening. Although they are busy with carpentry, electrical, and plumbing work during the day, their evenings are given to making evangelistic visits or leading evangelistic worship services. Often, the women who form part of the group will assist in vacation Bible schools in the communities. I have been informed that groups of this type are forming in almost every sector of North America. Some are identified programs sponsored by denominational offices, but others are spontaneous, often inter-faith, groups of older Christians who have a Great Commission vision.

Even nursing home residents are assisting in evangelistic ministries. Velma Sissom sends from 30 to 40 cards to persons who visit her church or whose names have been shared with her for prayer. At age 78, although she is suffering from diabetes, she is continuing her ministry from her wheelchair and room in the Baptist Convalescent Center in Newport, Kentucky. She began her ministry in 1948 and has mailed more than 60,000 cards to friends, church members, and strangers.[22]

Engaging Senior Adults

Many senior adults, as illustrated above, are actively engaged in the evangelistic mission of their churches. They only need to be encouraged, trained, and supported. Others, however, have been discouraged from doing anything in their churches because they have succumbed to the same "ageism" that has afflicted their younger ministers and church leaders. They need their minister's acceptance of them and their gifts, and they need to be challenged to reject "ageism" in favor of continuing to be a part of the Great Commission vision of their churches.

I delivered a lecture at Saint Paul School of Theology entitled, "Eating Elephants While Dining With Dinosaurs." In it I stressed the need to be cautious of attitudes and programs that assumed that all traditional ministry approaches are bad and those persons who continue to support them, such as the elderly, are to be manipulated and pushed aside. I appreciated William Easum's book, *Dancing With Dinosaurs*[23] and his newer one *Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers.*[24] I felt that he was on target with many of his suggestions and his call to change our paradigms as we enter the third millenium was significant. Thom Rainer's book, *Eating The Elephant* provided very practical steps leading to long term church growth.[25] What I feared was that my seminary students would assume that just because something was old and the people involved were old that they were dinosaurs that should become extinct and/or elephants that

needed to be eliminated. My suggestion is that we need to invite the dinosaurs to the banquet and involve them in preparing and eating the elephant. It is my theory that if we invite those who support the traditional to the table along with the contemporary, and take the time to treat them with Christian dignity and respect, together we can determine the best way to reach out to our shifting cultures with a unified effort that includes all age groups and utilizes the best of the old integrated with the best of the new. This will produce a synergistic effect that can accomplish more, under the incendiary power and presence of the Holy Spirit, than the sum of the results of separate efforts.

There is an old parable in senior adult work that says, "Senior adults will not be lazy except in the pursuit of someone else's objectives." In order for senior adults to be actively and energetically involved in evangelistic ministry they must first come to believe in it and believe that it is their "duty" in light of the Great Commission. Their generation respects "duty" to their Lord, their churches, their families, and their country. Senior adults, for the most part, love their churches and they love Jesus. If they come to believe that it is important for them to be involved in evangelism, their primary question will be, "How?"

Defining evangelism from a broad Biblical vantage point will be helpful when enlisting senior adults in evangelism. Many, if not most, perceive of evangelism as what Billy Graham or some other evangelist does. They may even expect it from their ministers, but few understand the various ways they can be evangelists. When they learn from Bible and other studies that sharing the Gospel can take many forms, they may find a place where they can "fit."

Just as personal evangelism might be most effective utilizing a relational approach, enlisting senior adults in evangelistic ministries is best accomplished through personal contact and discipleship. One of the most effective personal witnesses I know is Bob, who was a member of my church in Lansing, Michigan. He was in his late 60s when I met him twenty years ago. He was so timid that I never thought that he could be an effective personal soul winner. He was willing, however, to go with me as I presented the Gospel. He would sit and quietly pray and observe while I presented the Gospel, answered questions, and prayed with persons who expressed a desire to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. After a few weeks, I asked Bob to share his own story with a man, approximately his own age. He was nervous but he complied. The man became a Christian and it transformed Bob. After about six months as my partner, he was ready to take on a trainee and we doubled our efforts in personal evangelism. The last time I heard about him I learned that he was in a nursing home. His pastor reported that Bob had become the church's most consistent evangelistic visitor as long as he was able. Personal, one-to-one training is probably our most effective approach with senior adults.

Another effective strategy for engaging senior adults in the church's evangelistic ministry is through reading books and attending study groups on evangelism. Many older persons love to read and they are looking for opportunities to learn something new. There are a number of very good books on evangelism that were written for lay persons. Some of them are, *Lifestyle Evangelism: Learning to Open Your Life to Those Around You* by Joe Aldrich; *Evangelism For All God's People*, by Leonard Sanderson and Ron Johnson; and *Me, an Evangelist?: Every Christian's Guide to Caring Evangelism*, by William J. McKay. Most mainstream and mainline denominations publish resources for training in evangelism, and these can be very helpful as well.

Finally, and most importantly, no evangelism will be successful without extensive prayer before and during the effort. This is just as true for senior adults as it is for any other age cohort. Prayers that acknowledge God for who God is and what God desires from each person is a beginning point. Prayers of repentance and personal cleansing on the part of those who are engaging in the evangelistic effort are essential. Prayers of surrender to God's Holy Spirit and a personal commitment to doing things God's way will open the door to powerful witnessing. Intercessory prayers for the church and for specific people in the community who need to hear the gospel should proceed the witnessing effort.

Evangelism of, with, and by senior adults has been a neglected component in the teaching of evangelism in theological schools and denominational agencies. The new senior adults who are riding the crest of the "age wave" are bringing even greater challenges to the Christian churches of North America. It is my prayer that we will include them in the training and preparation of evangelists for the 21st century.

NOTES

[1]Gary L. McIntosh, *Three Generations* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1995).

[2]Win Arn and Charles Arn, *Catch The Age Wave* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993) 7-38.

[3]See Alvin Toffler's book, *The Third Wave*, for an enlightening discussion of the economic power shifts.

[4]Harold G. Koenig, *Aging and God* (New York: The Haworth Press, 1994) 165-185.

[5]See Ken Dychtwald and Joe Fowler, *Age Wave* (Los Angeles: Tarcher, 1989), and Peter G. Peterson, *Gray Dawn* (New York: Times Books, 1999), for a thorough discussion of the aging phenomenon that is literally global.

[6]Peterson, 12-15.

[7]John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene, *Megatrends 2000* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc. 1990) 275.

[8]Jane Thibault, *A Deepening Love Affair: The Gift of God in Later Life* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1993).

[9]"104-year-old's baptism elicits 'football shuffle'" in Baptist Press, 1995.

[10]George G. Hunter, "The "Celtic" Way For Evangelizing Today," in the *Journal Of The Academy For Evangelism In Theological Education*, (Volume Thirteen, 1997-1998) 17.

[11]Laura Ehrlich, "90-year-old realizes 'I needed to be saved'" Baptist Press, 1996.

[12]Koenig, 428-429.

[13]Language from Acts 1:8.

[14]Thibault, 64.

[15]Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992) 111-230.

[16]Peter Drucker, in his book, *Managing For The Future* uses the Willow Creek church and the First Baptist Church of Richmond, Va., as illustrations of this point.

[17]Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995).

[18]For examples, visit Frazier Memorial United Methodist Church in Montgomery, Alabama and First Baptist Church, in Raytown, Missouri.

[19]Arn and Arn, 93-114.

[20]See for a more thorough discussion Michael C. Mack, *The Synergy Church: A Strategy for Integrating Small Groups and Sunday School* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996); and Ken Hemphill, *Revitalizing The Sunday Morning Dinosaur*(Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996).

[21]Norman Miller, "Texas octogenarian wins 108 to Christ in Kenya Crusade" Baptist Press, 1995.

[22]Joyce Sweeny Martin, "78-year-old's ministry tops 60,000 cards, 15,000 calls" in Baptist Press, 1998.

[23]William Easum, *Dancing With Dinosaurs* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993).

[24]William Easum, *Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

[25]Thom S. Rainer, *Eating The Elephant* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994).

UNDERSTANDING PROTESTANT MARGINALITY

Penny Long Marler

In his book appropriately entitled *Faithquakes*, Leonard Sweet has labeled the magnitude and pace of cultural change, "socioquakes."[1] Real and anticipated shifts in the family and age structure, in racial and ethnic diversity, and in religious affiliation and involvement prompt a number of responses: some individuals and institutions are thrown together depending on each other (and older, tried and true strategies) to stave off the immediate effects of change; others are split apart, forcefully and finally, or less radically so that it simply becomes more difficult for individuals and/or institutions to reach each other; and still others—individuals *and* institutions—rally in the face of change and create new strategies of action out of the loose rubble of former habits and lifeways.

The Changing American Landscape

To set a context I would like to take you on a brief journey over the rapidly rearranged and rearranging landscape of American culture. This is the world that has formed and informed nearly 78 million Americans on the margins of the church.

Recent demographic data illustrate the extent of family structure change since the pew-packed fifties. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, at the close of the fifties almost half of all households consisted of married couples with children. By 1990, however, this proportion dropped by 20 percentage points.

So what types of households replaced nuclear families? "Other family households"—mostly single parent families—and the increase in nonfamily households made up of young singles and older widowed persons living alone. In fact, a full 80% of all U.S. family households are single persons living alone. The traditional family of the fifties is no longer the sociological norm. Divorces, out-of-wedlock births, delayed marriage and child-rearing due to higher education and careers, and longevity combine to produce a pluriform family portrait. Even families that retain a traditional structure experience dramatic changes in day-to-day function. And what of the future?

There is little reason to believe that a return to a nuclear family-centered culture is likely for the next *thirty* years. At least for that period, the aging of the baby boom, as well as their diverse family

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structures, will continue to make an impact. In fact, by 2040 demographers project that the proportion of the American population over 65 will exceed that under the age of 18.[2]

As the population ages, the proportion of married couples with children will continue to decline. At the same time, the proportion of married couples without children is projected.[3] Older empty-nested couples will predominate as the baby boom moves into retirement.

In addition to "familyquakes and agequakes," there are also "colorquakes." While family restructuring has been occurring for nearly thirty years, there is a major shifting and restructuring of the racial/ethnic population ahead. Over the next thirty to sixty years the U.S. Population will experience the kind of racial change that only American inner cities have witnessed heretofore. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 1990 three-quarters of the population was white and only a quarter was Black, Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian. By 2020, the white population will have fallen to 63% and Hispanics will replace Blacks as the next largest racial/ethnic group. And finally, the U.S. Census Bureau projects that by 2050 the one-time White majority will constitute barely half of the total U.S. population.

As the birth rate falls among whites, it will likely remain high among racial/ethnic populations. For that reason, the future growth of not-long-to-be minority groups will be among the young. In fact, while ethnic or black children constituted only 31% of the population of Americans under eighteen in 1990, census projections indicate that by 2050, nearly 60% of all children under eighteen years of age will be ethnic or black.

While Sweet talks about familyquakes, agequakes and colorquakes, he does not address what we feel is a major—but largely unheralded—social change: churchquakes. As you will see, we have good reason to suspect that "churchquakes" are not unrelated to other social and cultural shifts.

In order to measure change in church membership since 1950, Kirk Hadaway and I selected 14 denominations (six conservative and 8 mainline denominations with good records for that period of time). The six conservative denominations included the Church of God (Anderson), the Church of the Nazarene, the Seventh-day Adventists, the Assemblies of God, the Southern Baptist Convention, and the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod. The eight mainline denominations included the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Church of the Brethren, the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Reformed Church in America, the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the United Methodist Church. The results are a trendline remarkably similar to that of the birth rate: a steady decline

in average percent membership change beginning in the mid to late 50s, bottoming out in the early 70s and leveling through the 80s.

What about differential growth and change between conservative and more mainline denominations? Separating the denominational families is particularly revealing. Based on their own self-reports in *The Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*, both conservative and mainline denominations experienced a decline in percentage growth from the 50s through the 80s. The primary difference, of course, is the fact that while the mainline denominations actually experienced membership loss conservative denominations continue to grow. They simply grew at a much slower rate. Certainly, there is little evidence here of a "conservative resurgence" as Roof and McKinney suggested in *American Mainline Religion.*[4]

How does this picture of church statistics match up with much-publicized results of Gallup poll surveys? The truth is, they don't. Gallup poll surveys show consistently high levels of church membership (around 63%) and attendance (around 42%) among American Protestants. If this was an accurate portrait of the American Protestant constituency, then the denominations should have experienced steady growth (in step with the population) over the last thirty years. By the denominations' own accounting, however, this does not seem to be the case.

So, as I turn to poll data in order to illustrate the size and shape of churchquakes, *remember* that these numbers probably underestimate the extent of marginality. According to data from the General Social Survey (which is very close to Gallup poll date), about half of the U.S. population is active in a local church (that is, attends church at least once a month). The other half is made up of three distinct groups: the "underchurched" who claim to be members of local congregations and who say they go "several times a year" or less; the "unchurched" who identity with a denomination, are not members of local congregations, and who go to church "several times a year" or less; and then, finally, "nones" who are the true or classic unchurched because they never did or no longer do identify with a denomination or belong to a local church. Altogether, these three groups represent about 76 million persons on the margins of the church and that may well be an underestimate!

What themes have emerged in this tour of the changing American landscape? Familyquakes of the sort that marginal Protestants are well-acquainted with: many are divorced; most are employed (women and men); a great number have changed careers 2 times or more; and many are single. Agequakes that discriminate against no group: marginal Protestants are found among buster, boomers, and preboomer cohorts. Colorquakes that are increasingly evident: marginal Protestants are of all races. And churchquakes

that leave institutions and individuals scrambling to survive revive or revise their tenuous relationships.

Underchurched and Unchurched Protestants

Let me turn now to the characteristics of those two very large, very different groups that have here-to-fore been lumped into one large category, the unchurched.

We have identified four types of underchurched Protestants. In our research, the underchurched are defined as adult Protestants 21 years and older who: claim a religious affiliation, membership in a local church, and who attend worship services "several times a year or less." Surveys and long interviews with over 200 of these underchurched Protestants result in the following four groupings or types: we have labeled them the Locked Out, Soured Out, Drifted Out and the Let Out.

The "underchurched" are really the inactives currently on church rolls, or they may be members who have been officially "cleaned off" church rolls although they still identify with your congregation. The church has removed them; but they haven't removed themselves.

The "unchurched" in our schema are very different kinds of folk-although, as you will see, they share some common resources and strategies. In this study, the unchurched are defined as adult Protestants 21 years and older who: claim a religious affiliation, do not claim church membership, and who attend worship services "several times a year or less." Surveys and long interviews with over 500 of these unchurched Protestants yielded the four following types: Moral Idealists, Religious Skeptics, Secular Pragmatists, and Spiritual Seekers.

If we imagine a set of concentric circles with active church members in the center, the underchurched would be one ring removed from the active core, while the unchurched would be significantly beyond the institutional church. Both groups can be arrayed on two poles or continua that represent the dominant religious styles or approaches among marginal Protestants. The first pole, labeled "resources," indicates the degree to which marginal Protestants turn to religious, corporate resources (the church or a parachurch group or religious movement) *or* to secular, more individualistic resources for making sense out of major life transitions and for anchoring their varied spiritual and religious struggles and needs.

The second pole reflects two differing "strategies" that marginal Protestants typically employ in their religious quest which is, of course, largely outside of the institutional church. One strategy is "innovation" which means, simply, the act of introducing something new. For marginal Protestants operating out of social locus of control this means sampling novel religious and spiritual resources currently available in a number of forms in our culture—everything from new age practices to Native American spirituality or Eastern religious thought. For marginal Protestants operating out of an individual locus of control this means syncretically coupling secular, pragmatic philosophies with traditional religious tenets.

The second dominant strategy is "deconstruction" which is, simply, the act of taking apart or breaking down to the most fundamental principles or elements. Marginal Protestants whose primary religious strategy is "deconstruction," first of all, view religious or spiritual innovation as "heresy" at worst, "dilution" at best. They are primarily concerned with cutting through institutional or cultural clutter to the heart of religious truth. Of course, "deconstruction" presumes one has something to "take apart," and indeed, the fact that these marginal Protestants all had heavy religious socialization early on is important—key, in fact—for understanding the cause and consequences of their deconstruction project now.

For marginal Protestants operating out of a social locus of control "deconstruction" involves getting down to the "heart" or "core" of what it means to be a Christian, a church, or even a church-goer. Inasmuch as the institutional church doesn't "measure" up or, conversely, they themselves don't "measure up" then that becomes a barrier to involvement. For marginal Protestants operating out of an individual locus of control, "deconstruction" boils down to a stringent, personal critique of church doctrine, practice and organization "by its own rules." There is a bit of arrogance in this stance. Individualist "deconstructors" tend to conclude that the church is "not necessary" or that their personal philosophy (originally conceived in some church setting) somehow transcends traditional understandings.

Characteristics of the Underchurched

Let me briefly highlight the characteristics of each group beginning with the underchurched. The **Locked Out** are the largest group of underchurched Protestants (35%). They were more active in the church as youth than any other group and tend to be older, married or widowed adults. A disproportionate number live in the South. They engage in private religious practices; they see themselves as religious persons; and they hold conservative Christian beliefs and conservative social values. Lower levels of church participation are primarily related to logistical barriers. Many of the Locked Out have chronic health problems, and others are taking care of someone who is elderly or ill. Still others work on Sunday, have a spouse who refuses to attend or have not found a church in which they feel comfortable.

The Locked Out view the institutional church as a necessary resource; they are not innovators. Their preferred strategy of action continues to be "going to church," and their dominant way of dealing with the fact that that channel is blocked is to deconstruct the behavior by revising the traditional axiom that "you have to go to church to be a good Christian." They know that they are "good Christians" even though they are no longer able to attend church regularly.

The **Soured Out** (17%) are just what their name suggests. They score highest on a church criticism scale and lowest on a church support scale. Surprisingly, they are our smallest group of underchurched Protestants. They are neither young nor old and they live disproportionately in the South. In addition, they tend to come from conservative Protestant backgrounds. Indeed, the Soured Out were very active in the church as children. All, however, have rejected participation in later life—most citing the failings of the church to measure up to the image that it presents and teaches. The Soured Out are religious liberals, but are not particularly liberal in other areas of life.

The **Drifted Out** (23%) are the youngest and most mobile group of underchurched Protestants. They grew up on the periphery of the church and continue to express a marginal form of religious involvement—both publicly and privately. They feel "vaguely positive" about the church—perhaps because they are not close enough to be very critical. They view the church as a "good thing" but church attendance is simply something they "aren't into." While they hold somewhat traditionalistic religious beliefs (a tribute to sporadic church attendance when they were young), their social and political beliefs tend to be quite liberal. Their religious talk is peppered with a mix of axioms drawn as much from popular culture as from the Bible or a denominational tradition, and in this sense, they are quite innovative. They are also very individualistic: their religious and spiritual quest is a lonely one.

The **Let Out** (25%) live disproportionately in the Northeast and identify with mainline denominations. They are the least mobile group of underchurched Protestants, and tend to live close to their church. They hold liberal social and religious beliefs, but they are not critical of the church. In fact, they are quite supportive. The Let Out are not guilty when they don't attend—a fact at least partially related to the lower norms for church attendance held by the mainline. In addition, because the Let Out embrace life as a variety of options, they are less tied to local churches to meet their religious needs. They feel free to experiment with a variety of other religious philosophies and practices while retaining their primary tie to a mainline church community.

Characteristics of the Unchurched

Profiling the rich research on the unchurched provides a tantalizing peek at this population. I'll first profile them and then illustrate them through vignettes from our interviews. They are the Moral Idealists, Religious Skeptics, Secular Pragmatists, and Spiritual Seekers.

Moral Idealists (20%) include a wide range of ages. Few are college-educated. Most are married or widowed. They live disproportionately in the South and are not mobile. Most were active in the church as children and a distinct majority identify with a conservative denomination. They hold very conservative beliefs about religion and social issues. They feel guilty about not attending church and they believe that one must attend church and give money to the church in order to be a good Christian. In sum, Moral Idealists hold strong denominational identities and value the beliefs, religious practices, and behavioral norms of the church. In fact, Moral Idealists take them more seriously than do most active church members. Why have they dropped out? Simply because the church does not live up to their very conservative ideals *or* because they themselves do not live up to their very conservative ideals. Either the church is not "good enough" for them or they are not "good enough" for the church.

Religious Skeptics (23%) come in all ages, too. Most are settled and married, but a sizable proportion are single and mobile. In fact, they don't form a clear, demographically identifiable group. Skeptics were involved with the church as children and most claim to be Protestant. Still less than half call themselves Christians. The vast majority do not consider themselves to be religious or spiritual, and they almost never attend church, even on holidays. In personal interviews, it was clear that Religious Skeptics were interested in religion—particularly religious questions—despite the fact that they do not see themselves as religious persons.

Religious Skeptics retain, then, a residual Protestant identity that they once held more strongly. They have since raised significant intellectual questions about the existence of a supernatural at all. They haven't closed off the possibility of a God, and to the extent that they "seek," they do it individually, eclectically, and rationally. For a variety of reasons, they are very skeptical of taken-for-granted and non-reflective traditions/rituals. Nevertheless, skeptics may admire individuals who have obviously experienced God and are comfortable with churches and other religious institutions. But most skeptics admit that they haven't had such experiences and will remain skeptical (and outside the church) until they do.

Secular Pragmatists (34%) are young, single or divorced, highly educated, disproportionately male, and extremely mobile. Most dropped out of church early on, as children or teens. They hold very liberal beliefs concerning sexuality and other social issues.

Secular Pragmatists are irreligious by most measures: They reject the authority of God; few consider themselves to be "religious" or report that they feel "close to God"; and many think that church is boring. At the same time, many secular pragmatists have explored alternative forms of religious expression and say that they are spiritual persons.

Secular Pragmatists have a very loose Protestant identity. Many, in fact, claimed one religious affiliation at our first interview and another on the second interview. After some digging, we usually discovered that the first claim was the church they were brought up in, and the second was "non-denominational" by which they meant "Protestant but no particular denomination." Secular Pragmatists admit no real interest in the church. It is not an important part of their lives, and they don't feel the need to attend. They have not missed the church and see no reason for becoming members.

Spiritual Seekers (23%) are disproportionately from the Baby Boom generation. They are highly educated, on average, and hold liberal social and religious values. Unlike Secular Pragmatists, they are typically married, settled and disproportionately female. They reject the authority of the church and few felt guilty about not attending. Like Secular Pragmatists, they score high in "non-traditional" expressions of religion, but they are much more serious about their explorations. This can be seen in the fact that a large proportion feel extremely close to God, even though many are uncomfortable with the word, "God." Many prefer, "creator" or "higher power." Nearly all see themselves as spiritual and religious persons.

Spiritual Seekers value their denominational roots—particularly their spiritual/religious experiences in churches. They also value the Bible and the presence and reality of a higher power. However, they have moved beyond the local church and more traditional forms of beliefs and practices—primarily because they don't "feel" anything in those groups. The church "awakened" a search for them, but it hasn't provided satisfactory spiritual depth. Other groups—many in the parachurch or new religious movements, others more informal and "homegrown"—provide an outlet for their religious quest.

Norma's Spiritual Quest

Welton, Connecticut, is a small blue-collar town about 40 miles south of Hartford. I had an interview scheduled with a 37 year-old woman named Norma late on a Thursday afternoon. I was meeting her at the Steelworkers Union local: she worked there as a part-time secretary. Her husband is employed at the steel mill. Norma is also studying for an Associate's Degree in Science. She'd like to work as a legal secretary someday.

The union office is located over a nondescript pizza parlor in a small strip mall. Norma met me at the side entrance, and I followed her up the stairs. Norma is about my height with shoulder-length blonde hair; she has clear blue eyes, is fair-skinned, and has a very distinct northeastern accent. She had on jeans and a white shirt with the sleeves rolled up to her elbows.

First, Norma walked me through her experience with the church. This is the story that I heard: "I was born in Vermont, and my father had come down here [to Welton when I was 2] to get a job at Pratt and Whitney. He was renting a house just around the corner from here, and then he sent for us. The neighbors were an older couple. Dora Prince, and her husband Charles...Dora was very into the Catholic church...I don't know why she took an interest in me but she did. And I use[d] to go over there on Sundays... And then after a while, it got to the point where she would ask if I wanted to go to church... [I was] maybe five or six. So that was a big deal. I started going...and in those times, you had to wear a little something on your head. It was pretty fun... I made my confirmation. I made Holy Communion, and then I kind of dropped out of it... maybe because I was getting to be a teenager.

"Down the street from me [lived] my girlfriend Bonnie. Her uncle is a minister. [Well, at the time] I was getting really messed up because my parents were going through [a separation]. I started spending a lot of time down at [Bonnie's] house, and she started asking me to go to youth groups... I got into the choir and stuff and finally, I felt a need for Jesus. So I told her uncle, and went in his office. [He] and I prayed and I accepted Christ. And there's no feeling like that, anywhere. For me, it was like, it was like a shell was broken off, and a new person was there. And there was a glow in that room, and it was a dark office—and it actually lit up. I swear to God. He was right there. He couldn't be any closer to me than he was at that time. And it was just great.

"Things at home got really bad, and my mother left... and I stopped being such good friends with Bonnie. She stayed in that religious thing but I kind of pulled away. I was really messed up. I did drugs—anything, drinking. You name it, I was doing it... [And] I use[d] to cry and beg [God] to make this all better. I could never understand. I thought I was to blame... I think about it now, I wonder why I never really slumped right down to the bottom and never crawled back out. I guess I had a strength that I never knew about. Whether it was from God or whatever, I always felt that He was there anyway. We were close at one time."

"I believe that there are different areas, different realms, different zones in closeness to God." The first zone she told me about had to do with the neighbor, Dora, who she said had "sensed" what she needed spiritually. "She always got what I needed. She got the pretty Bible for me with the pictures in it. She made sure that I had the medallion with the cross and it's like she knew that I

needed those things... to be complete. And then when I moved on... I still felt that... what she did in that zone for me helped me to get into the next zone... And so I moved into the pre-teenage stuff, and I think if I had been a little stronger or felt loved, I probably would have stayed with it and not done drugs...[but] it just blew apart. Life at home; everything was just stinking so bad."

I asked Norma where she sees herself now in terms of these zones. She continued, "I skipped a lot of zones. I skipped zones that if I had stayed with [them], I would have been a bigger and better person and a different mother, possibly. But where am I now? I am just outside of...a zone where every adult should be... It should be like in the olden days when the whole family went to church. That's part of the reason why I didn't go, because [my husband] wouldn't go with me. And it's hard to get two little babies ready and off to church and yourself. And it got tiresome. But if he had been more into it like me [maybe]...[because] that zone is a great big zone and everybody is happy... And I picture myself standing outside of that zone. [Not just because of my husband] but for all of my own selfish human reasons. I just am not strong enough to take my kids and step into that zone. I don't know why."

Norma has not been to a church service in over three years. Still, in the second interview she said that she felt guilty when she misses church. I asked her to talk about that a bit. "Because God put me here for a reason," Norma said. "He's given me my daughters... I am here because of Him and it is up to me to choose. It's up to me to go to Him every single night or every morning and say to Him, 'Okay, what do you want me to do today?...and I know a lot things that have probably happened to me [are because]...I didn't relate with Him and discuss with Him or just put myself in His hands... I could go home right now and say to Him, I am so sorry, would you please come back in my life? And He would be there like that. I know it. And I feel bad because I am not raising my daughters to know that they have this link."

Norma talked to me about other religious groups she's tried. She tried a church called Hillview Christian Academy with a friend. But she says, "they are really too strong for me. They're really overbearing. And it makes me choke on it, and don't do that to me... And then the Jehovah Witnesses started coming. I was really getting into that. This woman had a lot of interesting things to say...and then, when I was having a hard time with my husband, I have a friend who is a Mormon. And they were pretty interesting too... See how I am open to all these things?"

I asked Norma about a Bible quote she referred to in the previous interview that she had said "choked her up." Norma leaned forward and said: "One Bible saying is, now, I can't quote it but it's so beautiful that [it] always got to me. I always felt bad for the whore. I always felt bad for her because she was just a human person. She reminds me of myself. Not that I was a whore but

that, but she is so human and He accepted her. He knew [what] was in her heart. He didn't take her for what she did.

And this is how Norma sees God. "I always picture Jesus in the front and God is like looking over his shoulder. I don't now know why I think of it that way, but yet I know they're one which is very confusing. And does he wear the white robe? Yes, and the beard and the long hair because that's the way that we think of Him. But I don't. I think that if you were black and you died and you went to heaven; then Jesus would be black. And if I died and I am white. He would be white... He's an Indian to someone else. Because he created someone in His own image."

When I asked Norma about prayer, she reflected,"...praying to God for me was not asking for things...it's like reaching inside yourself." Her answer then became a prayer. She said, "You don't know how much it means to me. I am so sorry that you died on the cross but I know that you had to... Sorry that I keep screwing up, but I know you're there and I know that you forgive me. And here's my life, show me what to do."

Norma is a Spiritual Seeker, representing 23% of all unchurched Protestants. Seekers are disproportionately from the baby boom generation, but are found among all age groups. They tend to be highly educated and hold fairly liberal social and political values and beliefs. They are typically married, settled, and disproportionately female.

Bob and the Irrelevance of Church

It's late spring in Atlanta, and Bob already has a tan. He's about six feet tall, athletic-looking, with dark hair and blue eyes. He's dressed pretty casually in shorts and a t-shirt. Bob is a senior majoring in Professional Sales Management at a local college. In order to support his lifestyle—disc golf and snow skiing trips—he also works part-time waiting tables at the Casey Rigg Company.

Bob is already checking out companies in his field. He says, "I am looking at two companies. One is Blue Circle... Blue Circle bought out Williams Brothers. They bought out their division and the cement part of their business and Blue Circle is nationwide. It's like pretty good money, and they offer you a car and I have been talking to them [Also I'm] talking to a company called Amsco... They specialize in sterilization equipment... They have developed [uniforms] that surgeons wear to perform surgery [on people with diseases like AIDS]. It's like 1,000 strands per inch and is supposed to be this top notch stuff. I hope that I can get into some of that... That would put me in the middle class. They'll be chopping me for taxes then. That sounds pretty good."

Kirk asked Bob about his earliest memory of the church. Bob responds, "I can remember my parents picking me up from the nursery...[at] St. Paul Methodist Church. It's not even five miles

from here. And well, the church always had little outings that I enjoyed. I liked going places and seeing things... Some aspects I enjoyed and some I didn't enjoy. The bottom line of the whole thing of the church is that I just didn't feel it in my heart. It was like they were pounding it into my head... I understood exactly what they were trying to do. [What they were] trying to mold me into... I am not taking anything away from some of the people that go to that church, [they are] the best people in the world. They would bend over backwards [for you]... I think basically religion keeps people... keeps [people] sane. It keeps them connected to something. And I think, in all of this, in all things, it gives them some calm and something to hold on to, you know? It gives them a reason [as] to why we're here... You've got have faith. And I just didn't. I have never felt that."

"My dad is very, very conservative," Bob continues, "I never met anybody who didn't like my dad... He worked for Southern Bell for 32 years... He was born up in the mountains and neither one of his parents ever drove a car or owned a car. They didn't have power. They were like the Waltons [with] a big family [and a] big farm house... I think sometimes [my dad], he's too conservative for his own good. I think he misses opportunities that would take him somewhere."

Bob told a story about his aunt, his father's sister, who is Southern Baptist: "His sister used to call up and practically preach to me. [She would] start reading from the Bible. When I got older, I just said, 'This is not what I want to hear.'... I don't think it conflicted with how I lived. I didn't have a problem with that. It's just I didn't want to hear it. I didn't agree with it. Just like I wouldn't want somebody calling me up reading pornography over the phone [either]... I told her that I didn't want to hear it. But [dad's] family is very religious. My mom's brother is real religious too. He is a preacher, got a big megaphone on his truck or his van and he's a Bible preacher. Pretty hard core."

Bob believes that his parents' backgrounds explain their spirituality. He observes, "I personally believe that you are pretty much a product of your environment. And you are pretty much going to be the religion that your parents are. If your parents are Jewish, you are going to be Jewish. If your parents are Methodist, you're going to be Methodist... Just because they didn't power religion into me [doesn't mean I didn't like some thing like camp]. [You] were just kind of growing up with your peers [at church] and having a good time. And I think half of religion is fellowship anyway... It was just clean fun. When I have children, I would like for them to do that too. Be able to go to a place like that, but without having to go to church."

Kirk urged Bob back to his religious biography. "By the time I got to middle school," Bob continued, "I decided that I really didn't want to go to church, because I just didn't. I don't know.

That's just how I felt... I just said that I don't believe this, and I can't play this charade anymore... And I didn't feel like I was missing anything due to the fact that I wasn't going to church. And I had a busy life. I had a good time, and I was enjoying myself and learning new things everyday. Because when you are that age; you're into everything. Something is new everyday. I can remember times when my parents used to say, 'Get up, you're going to church.' I was thinking, why are you making me do this?"... I can't say a negative thing, because I believe religion does an awful lot of good things for a lot of people... Not to say that I don't need any of those things. That's not why I don't go to church. They just turn [me] off."

In the second interview, Bob said that he prays sometimes. Kirk asked him about that. Bob said, "I would say more just kind of like, solemnly contemplate... because there are bad things going on. But I would [not] say it like I am sending out a signal, a message to some certain person. Because I don't really look at it like that. But it's kind of hard to [picture] God. They don't really paint pictures of God. You don't see that. And everybody, I guess, would have [their] own [picture]. I don't really know [that] I could even begin to imagine what he would look like, if there is a God. I sure wish that I could see it better."

On the topic of being religious versus being spiritual, Bob talked at length about his view of spirituality: "You can be spiritual just [by] being in touch with anything from your body, how you fit [into] what you see around you. Being perceptual. Being connected [to] the whole cosmos, you know. Yeah. Somehow being connected to [it] because we are all a part of it. And some people are probably more connected than others. And I think people are connected in different ways, too. You know, an artist is probably connected different[ly] than a linebacker for some football team. So you are connected in some different form. Spiritual, connected: I think they both refer to like a higher being. Being connected to that. Feeling close. But for some reason I don't see there being a higher being, if there is. You know what I mean? Controlling your life... I would like to think [I] could.'"

Bob is a Secular Pragmatist. Thirty-four percent of our unchurched population fall here. They are our youngest cluster: in fact 84% of pragmatists are under 45 years of age. They are predominantly single, highly educated, disproportionately male, and extremely mobile. They also hold very liberal beliefs concerning sexuality and other social issues. They are also the least religiously socialized group. Only 17% say they attended church regularly the last year of high school. Barely ten percent ever feel guilty when they miss church; and only 20% identify with a conservative Protestant denomination. This group is much more likely than any other group to respond: "I don't have anything against churches, I just don't feel the need to attend very often." So why do they

continue to identify? Interestingly enough, this particular group has the highest rate of exposure to church as children. Almost 85% say they joined the church as a child (higher baseline connection than any other group except active members).

Cheryl's Return to Church

I had a hard time finding Cheryl's apartment on the southwest side of Atlanta. She lives in a complex nestled in the bend of one of Atlanta's newest highway arteries that connects a zone of heavy industry with an older residential area. The area was originally middle-class white and has now become a predominantly lower to middle class black neighborhood. Cheryl's apartment is located deep within a labrynth of over 30 two-story, 20 unit buildings.

I talked with Cheryl in the kitchen at the back of her shotgun-style apartment. Her husband watched television in the front room, and her 12-year old son wandered in and out of the kitchen several times during the interview. Cheryl is tall--and what my mother prefers to call "big-boned." She wore a neat-looking pantsuit and little if any makeup. Cheryl has a broad, engaging smile, and she uses her hand a lot when she talks. Her laughter is deep and throaty.

Cheryl has a twelve-year old son, and she recently married a man she's "been with" for six years. Her father is a truck driver and her mother is a school teacher. They still live in Augusta, Georgia, where Cheryl was brought up. She has two brothers--one older, one younger. Cheryl has lived in Atlanta for four years. She works at the Veteran's Administration Hospital in the operating room as a nursing escort. At present, she is enrolled at DeKalb College to "become an R.N."

Cheryl's strongest and earliest memory of church was her baptism. She describes her experience this way: "They have church at night for a week and you go and sit up on the mourner's bench which is the first bench in the church.... They kind of put you up there, I guess [to] kind of give you a boost... when they think that you are ready... I think when me and my brother went up there, I was in the third grade and he was in the fourth...[mother] put both of us on the mourner's bench because everybody expected her to put us up there. So, we sat there and... I guess he didn't want to sit on it every single night [because] he got up and joined the church [the first night and] I sat there one more night, and then the next night I got up because is was expected of me. [Mother] made us... I think she was really going by the tradition."

Cheryl says she "wasn't really into the church" because she was "young." Then, later "when I was in junior high, my girl friends and I started going to a church that was local--right there in the neighborhood... and we started singing in the choir." After about two years--and a small controversy over the length of choir gowns--Cheryl said "We stopped singing in the choir [and] we just

started drifting back... after I graduated [from high school] I got into partying with my girlfriends although I still went to church because my mother would always look back there to make sure that I was on the bench. I was living on my own then and the only reason I went, I think [was] because I knew that she was going to look for me."

At some point during her "party days," Cheryl recalls: "I remember this one particular club we use[d] to go to all the time. It's kind of rough... I always said that I could never dance like that. I could never do that. I could never wear that. I could never act like that. And I was always looking at what I could never do. But I was there. And then, this thought come across my mind and I said, "Well, if judgment day was to come tonight, this is the last place that I would want the Lord to catch me.. and I stopped going."

Not long afterwards, Cheryl says "I had my son out of wedlock. [Then there was] my mother again, [and] tradition. They have this saying that once you have a baby out of wedlock, you're automatically out of the church. [And] it hurts. Nobody physically came up and asked me not to come to church [though] I just decided not to go. [I decided not] to give them the opportunity just in case... So, I didn't go, and [then mother] said that you have to come back to the church and ask for forgiveness. And [so] I decided out of tradition, out of respect for them and my mother... I said, okay, I will do that... I told [the preacher] what Sunday I was coming and when it was time for them to open the doors for you to join the church, I walked up there and I told him that I had sinned and I felt like I was out of the church and I wanted to be welcomed back into the fellowship and they did... [and] I started going to church every first and third Sunday because it was expected of me." Within a year Cheryl moved to Atlanta, and although she says "I wanted to join [a church and go] every Sunday... for some reason, I wouldn't get up off my behind."

But Cheryl is concerned for her son, "My son is 12 years old now, and I was talking to a minister about him because somewhere it states... that once a child reaches twelve, he becomes responsible for his own things that he does in life. But the parents are responsible for him up until twelve. So, I have been trying to coach him... well, if you want me to wait until you feel that you are ready, then we will walk there together."

Since our second interview, Cheryl did join a church. Her cousin had visited a nearby Baptist church and she said, "Why don't you go one Sunday because it reminds me of the church back home, and so I told her okay, I'll go...[and] it really is small... and [the pastor] he preaches more like on everyday standards... He will refer to the Bible and then he will refer to what's going on today. I like[d] it. I told myself all week that I was going to join it... And finally when Sunday did get here, I swear the Devil just roams through here--because I said these aren't the right color stockings or they won't pull all the way up or I can't seem to get this wrinkle out

of this side of the skirt...[So] I told my son, I said I am going to be real strong [this Sunday]... I said when they open their doors and they welcome everybody, I am going to wait a minute, and let the first person move, and then I am going on up there."

"So when church started I went to the bathroom [and] I said "Let me get some tissue because I just felt like I needed some tissue'... And [when] we started singing that song, "Jesus Loves Me,"... I just started boo-hoo crying... [I said to myself] You're going to have to get strong now. You're going to have to back these tears away. So I wiped the tears, I batted my eyes and I said that I am not going to cry another tear... So by the time that [the preacher] got to the part about opening the door... nobody moved and I said, 'Isn't this just great?' This would be the Sunday that nobody wants to join but me."

"I said [to my son], you don't want to go? He said, no... So I stood up and everybody started clapping, so I walked up to the front and he said, welcome sister... And I started crying so bad, I started trembling... He asked me to stand up and tell the church what the Lord had placed on my heart and... I just cried and I cried and he said, 'Well, we will wait on you... I had my head down because I couldn't even look at him and all of a sudden, I just saw all of these tears fall out of his eyes onto his tie. And he was crying too... It was like this burden was lifted and just flew somewhere..."

Moral Idealists like Cheryl are our smallest unchurched group at 20%. Idealists include a wide range of ages. Many are baby boomers, few are busters, and a disproportionate number are in their 70s or over. Few are college-educated. They live disproportionately in the South and very few have moved in recent years. Most were active in the church as children and a distinct majority identify with a conservative denomination.

Nelson's Skepticism

Nelson is a sixty-four year old chemist from Springfield, Ohio. He works for a business forms company, is married, and has two grown daughters. Nelson lives in a large, brick house on a quiet, tree-lined street in an upper middle class suburb. Kirk Hadaway, my research colleague, video-taped an interview with Nelson in the Spring of 1993.

Nelson was reared in a small town outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His maternal grandfather was a Presbyterian minister who Nelson describes as "an Orthodox Christian... a little bit on the strict side but I wouldn't want to paint him as a tyrant--or even a minor tyrant. But a little bit [like my mother]. Just a little restricted [in terms of] do's and don'ts." He especially recalls prayer at his grandfather's house: "We had prayers at the table. [We had to] kneel down on the floor in front of our chairs at the table when we had meals."

Both of Nelsons' parents were active in the Presbyterian church. Nelson says it was "a very friendly church and very positive situation... but I can remember fighting and crying about being dragged into church at the age of 4, 5, 6, 7, 8. Something like that." When he was a teenager, however, Nelson was more willingly involved. He became an usher and "went to the youth meetings in the evening and knew the pastor personally." Most of his friends, however, were not Presbyterians or members of Nelson's church.

When Nelson enrolled in Wooster College he mapped a course of study directed towards the ministry. He majored in philosophy and took two years of Greek. Nelson recalls that he got as far as "to visit Union, and gosh, I think Yale." His freshman year, he recalls "I roomed with a preministerial student... he started out thinking Normal Vincent Peale was the end and be all and I came in with a very conservative, extremely reactionary position and sometime during [that first] year, we changed positions.

After college, Nelson did a three-year stint in the service. He said, "During that period of time, I had a lot of time to think about going into the ministry. And I witnessed quite a few varieties of religious expression and religious practices... and began to develop some strain between what I thought I ought to do and what--buried deep inside of me--I really wanted to do. Well it was not the ministry. I knew that. And it wasn't dealing primarily with people."

Nelson explains his original call to the ministry in this way: "I think I had an 'ought.' I characterized myself as having an over-developed 'ought' in my whole personality. [And] I've maintained certain activities out of this sense of ought... I wouldn't call it responsibility. It's [more being] responsible to a certain performance or a certain path or a certain set of conduct. I don't know the origin of that except I think there is a lot of religious training in it. I think that early church and Sunday School is a 'you can take the boy out of the country but you can't take the country of out of the boy' [thing]. Even though I am not religious, in that I don't practice religion now, I have a lot of religious overtones and background in my thinking.

After military service, Nelson moved to Miami and took a job as a science teacher in a secondary school. He met his wife in Miami, and completed a Master's degree in chemistry at Miami University. He says, "I don't think I went into the church there. I can't recall going into the churches there at all. So by that time, any association with a church had been pretty well terminated... Then we came to Dayton [and] we attended church kind of sporadically. When the two girls were born, we took them to church and Sunday School...until they were three or four, maybe... I think my wife's mother had been very religious and my wife had attended church regularly when she was still living at home. But I think I infected

her with my skepticism and we just kind of discontinued going to church."

When they moved to Springfield, Nelson says they went to a Presbyterian church for a while. "The sermons I heard there just didn't move me at all," he recalls, "[and] the church music was so, so." He even says he composed "my own counter-sermons to the one that was being given" which he admits is part of "my skepticism." Then again, he says, "we just kind of dropped out."

When Kirk asked Nelson if he ever felt God's presence, he said, "No. I don't think I have. I get emotional... [over] what I consider a [to be] a tremendous insight into human feelings or human activity. And I don't understand [what happens to me], there's certain people and situations [that] I get very emotional about but I have never had an experience [in] which I said, 'this was a conversion experience,' and I may never have felt that I was that bad a sinner that I need to be converted... No I guess the closest I'd ever say [I'd come] to the presence of something supreme have been aesthetic experiences rather than religious experiences. Some music I think is tremendously moving. Beethoven's violin concerto. And then I remember seeing Cooke's Forest which is a virgin forest in western Pennsylvania. When it had rained and was foggy and then the sun came out and shone down through the tall trees and left shadows. Things like that move me." Nelson's voice breaks and his eyes well with tears, he pulls in his bottom lip slightly and leans back in his chair, squeezing his arms tighter across his chest. He gathers himself and then he says, "But I have never had what I consider to be a divine spirit type of emotion." Although, Nelson adds, "I have had lyrical feelings about work that I have accomplished.

Nelson concluded the interview with a very frank discussion of his religious identity: "Well, my denomination is immaterial. But if somebody said, 'Well, what would be [your] beliefs?'... [I would say] let's sit down and talk about it. Let's work this out. I guess [for me] communication would be the ultimate communion. And I think [there's] a dual operator there, it's not just a single source... And I suppose if you analyze[d] it in terms of classical Protestant theology, it would probably...[be identified] as pride. Personal pride in my own thoughts, my own analysis. And I am sure that the enjoyment of my... skepticism was a factor in going away from the church. Now, did the church instigate that? Probably to some extent, but I am sure that I have built on it... But I don't think of that as necessarily religious because I guess if I pushed it, I would define religion as being that portion of spiritual experience that is institutionalized, and maybe it is the institution that I am reacting against. I don't know. [But] I imagine if Christ came [in] and talked to me today. He might take me on as a follower."

Nelson is a Religious Skeptic. Skeptics do not form a demographically identifiable group. Instead, what they share is a skeptical orientation toward religion. They claim to be Protestant, but less than half call themselves Christian. Only 6 percent say they are "extremely close to God." The vast majority are neither religious nor spiritual. They almost never attend church, even on holidays.

Why We Should Listen

Well, our journey is nearly complete. What of these underchurched and unchurched Protestants? Are there connections between the underchurched and the unchurched groups? Although I would not claim that there is any kind of explicit "path" from the active core to the Let Out or the Soured Out positions to the Spiritual Seeker and the Religious Skeptic positions, there are certainly similar biographies and orientations at work in these groups. The Let Out, for example, would not be averse to the kinds of exploration that Spiritual Seekers want to pursue. They are, however, a bit more traditional—in the liberal mainline sense—than are Seekers. And both groups would need to be "re-educated" as to the potential benefits of active church involvement. Neither are likely to be interested in business-as-usual.

The Locked Out and Moral Idealists only share a strong orientation to traditional church images and practices. The Locked Out, however, are logistically "blocked" from church involvement; Moral Idealists are really ideologically blocked. The orientations are somewhat similar in that they value the traditional church and what it teaches. Still, one barrier--namely, logistics--is easier to tackle. The Drifted Out seem very similar to the Secular Pragmatists on a number of fronts: social and political values, church exposure, consumer tastes, and busyness. However, the Drifted Out are a little more religiously innovative and a little more conventional in terms of participation in rituals (christenings, church weddings and funerals, holiday service attendance). Perhaps a Drifted Out Protestant could become a Secular Pragmatist over time: but I suspect that it is more likely that the children of the Drifted Out, the Let Out, and Religious Skeptics are all candidates for the Secular Pragmatist stance. It is worth noting that 6 out of 8 categories share one thing that contributes to their lingering denominational identity: some kind of baseline church experience. My greatest fear in relationship to the underchurched and the unchurched is not only a fear for their continuing spiritual struggles and quests but a fear for the next generation, their children, who are getting precious little religious socialization. That's the bad news.

Now for the good news. The majority of underchurched and unchurched people we have met and talked to in the course of this research are very interested in talking about their spiritual and religious journeys. They have wept; they have laughed; they have become angry (but really rarely); they have come to what seem to be new insights in the course of our data-gathering; they have

mentioned that they might go back after we talked to them (and some have); and they generally welcomed the opportunity to talk about "things religious." And there is a very real sense in which listening to these marginal Protestants is like listening to the future talk to the past: I have heard stories of the personal pain of divorce only exacerbated by the pain of ostracism from a local church; I have heard stories from single persons who felt strange and alone in a church that seemed only to celebrate marriage and families. I have heard the stories of older persons who were virtually forgotten by their churches because they were no longer as physically fit as they once were; I have heard the stories of people who have keenly felt the racial prejudice of local churches and wondered why the church is so far behind the workplace not to mention the gospel; and I have also heard countless stories of deep appreciation for the part that a church once played in their past, in their coming to Christ, and in their moral development.

What, then, can the church do? Before an organization can retool in times of unsettlement, it must "rethink" what it is doing and why, and who it really cares about, wants to touch and teach. In the literature, this kind of organization may be thought of more as customer-sensitive than customer-driven. This research has been all about "rethinking" marginal Protestants and becoming sensitive not only to where "they" are, but also to the part that "we" play in pushing them to the periphery of our institutions and keeping them there. What I hope you heard in their stories is something besides brute consumer wants and tastes. I hope that you have heard what I heard the first time I knocked on their doors—not knowing who or what I was to hear—and entered their homes: that is, individuals who are searching, hurting, risking, confused, and yes, even competent.

Several months ago, Kirk Hadaway and I presented the results of this research to heads of evangelism from 17 different Protestant denominations in this country. I'd like to close with the words of one denominational leader who reviewed our data, who read the stories, and who watched video-taped interviews.

"First of all, I'm very thankful for the research because I think it allows us to hear voices that we who are related to churches don't always hear and I think that there's a real discipline required of us to really listen to the voices. And I have felt the tendency sometimes in our group, among all of us, to rush in with a prescription to fix this person... without really taking the time and discipline to really hear the person first before we respond... [Second] I think that marginal [Protestants] may be people who have been marginalized by the church as it currently exists. And in that—we have to own [our] part....

"[Third] There [are] some dichotomies that I think have tended to be prevalent in our discussions as well. And one dichotomy is between us and them. I don't think that the marginal member is

wholly other. I think they are "us" as well. They are already in our churches. We need to acknowledge [the ones] who are already among us and really listen and attend to what they're saying even though they might not yet have left the pews because I think that in creating [the kind of] environment [where] we're responding to their own questioning thoughts, all of us are enriched.

"And that leads me to... another dichotomy. [That is the fact] that we've often seen ourselves as giving them something and not them giving us something. And it's not just what we can give to them but what they can give to us [that's important]. I think that we need to acknowledge that there are gifts of the skeptics, and the seekers, and the moral idealists and so forth, and they need to be recognized because of what they [e]voke in us. I think that they can enable the church to strengthen and articulate and be more sensitive to their own faith.

"[So] own the truth you feel that you have through those kinds of interactions [with marginal Protestants] rather than creating barriers that don't allow real honest discussion and dialogue to occur. [Marginal Protestants] are not just there for us to focus our evangelical theologies on, they do something to us... We look at them as objects rather than recognizing that in a relational world they have gifts and they can draw out our gifts if we're open... And you might think of the story of the doubting Thomas [because] not only was Thomas changed, but the disciples, the community changed because of that interaction with the doubter."

NOTES

[1]Leonard Sweet, *Faithquakes* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1994).

[2]U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1994.

[3]Thomas Exter, "Demographic Forecasts: Married with Kids," *American Demographics* 55 (February 1990).

[4]Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney, *American Mainline Religion* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1987).