

Witness

Journal of the **Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education**

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Witness Journal of the **Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education**

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Witness is the peer-reviewed journal of the Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education (AETE), which was founded in 1973 to resource, encourage, and support professors who teach evangelism in seminaries, theological schools, and universities. *Witness* provides a forum to exchange ideas, sharpen or challenge perspectives, and test pedagogies. Although all of the articles that appear in *Witness* have been carefully reviewed, they do not necessarily reflect the views of AETE.

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Submission of Articles: *Witness* welcomes original articles of high academic standards that deal with the theology, practice, and teaching of evangelism. Contributors should follow the Chicago Manual of Style format with endnotes. All articles should be in MSWord, double-spaced, no more than 18 pages in length, and sent electronically to Al Tizon at atizon@eastern.edu. Contributors should also include a short bio. Because *Witness* is an annual journal, please be patient with the Editor's response.

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Editor's Take

Fresh, Emerging, Experimental, and Colorful Expressions

Control freak that I am, I often wish that God, life, culture, society, church, people, etc. would just sit still and be static. That way, we could always count on these things to remain as they always have been and forever will be. Would it not be the scholar's dream to understand reality fully, to write about it definitively, and to manage it handily? Of course, to describe something as such (i.e., not growing or not changing) is to describe something that is dead. So at the end of the day, I am glad that God does not oblige control freaks like me, because reality is very much alive—growing unpredictably and changing dynamically all around us.

Take the church, for example. Despite the resistance mounted by traditionalists in every age, the church has continued to prove her tenacity for life—to be the living, breathing, ever-changing Body of Christ, even as she upholds the unchanging gospel. In the face of cultural and societal shifts, new types of churches form and old churches re-form in order to bear witness to the good news faithfully and effectively.

At the last AETE annual meeting, several members gave presentations that featured various forms of church renewal. Some of those presentations grace the pages of this issue of *Witness*. In the opening article, John Bowen provides an overview of the renewal that has been taking place within the Church of England, as “fresh expressions” of Christian community continue to sprout in the UK. Rick Richardson follows with an article on “emerging missional

movements” in the United States, as he provides commentary on how these various movements, such as the emerging church, missional church, the new monastics, and others, are redefining American evangelicalism in both positive and potentially adverse ways. Achim Härtner’s article, which was ably translated from German by Duke Divinity School student Stephanie Gehring and Duke Professor Stephen Gunter, focuses on the emerging church movement. The fact that Härtner brings a German—and furthermore, a Wesleyan—perspective to bear upon the emerging church, which has arisen primarily in Western Europe and North America, makes his interpretation especially intriguing. Paul Chilcote’s article, which is an adaptation of the introduction to his upcoming book, *Making Disciples in a World Parish*, discusses lessons from Methodist practices around the world on disciple-making that can be (and should be) learned by all.

We are honored to feature an article by Robert E. Coleman, author of the enduring *Master Plan of Evangelism*. Originally presented at the Evangelical Theological Society Annual Meeting in 2010, this article reminds us that the precise meaning of “saving faith” should unite evangelicals; let us disagree on other theological matters, but not at this crucial juncture. And in the final article of this volume, Jeffrey Snyder, who among other things is a professional Christian clown, draws from his experience as such to remind the church of the joy that should come in the evangelistic task. Evangelism is often characterized as hard, awkward, necessary, urgent, or all of the above—but joyful? Tied together, then, by the cords of saving faith and joy, this bundle of articles on church and evangelism aims to inspire reflection and action for the sake of the gospel.

One of the highlights of the 2010 annual meeting was the presentation given by Soong-Chan Rah, who shared insights from his controversial book, *The Next Evangelicalism*. The perspective he brought to the table—namely, the absolute importance of considering what is

happening in non-white Christian communities, lest church renewal studies become a strictly Western enterprise—must be taken into account. Although his presentation from the AETE annual meeting is not included in this issue, we are glad to present new insights from him via an interview conducted by Montague Williams as they conversed together around Rah's recently published book, *Many Colors*.

I am painfully aware of the absence of women's voices in this issue. This is doubtless indicative of the male-dominated field of missiology in general and evangelism in particular. But as disturbingly true as that is, the fact is that no women submitted any articles this time around. So let me plead with the women among us: we desperately need to hear your voices—not just for future issues of *Witness*, but for the future of the church.

Yours for the sake of the gospel,

Al Tizon, Editor

A Beginner's Guide to Fresh Expressions: Surprising Lessons from the Church of England

John P. Bowen

The fresh expression of church movement is ordinary grassroots Christians passionately trying to find appropriate ways to reach their unchurched neighbors. And it has all the marks of a spontaneous work of the Holy Spirit.

If people have an image of the Church of England, it is generally of an elderly, genteel and sleepy church, centering on ancient, decaying buildings in delightful rural settings. Although those churches certainly exist (I have been to some of them), the full reality is very different.

This came home to me some years ago, when two people independently told me that the Church of England had been planting new congregations at the rate of one every two weeks for the previous

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ten years. This was news to me. Then a Church of England report, *Breaking New Ground*, was written to respond to this new reality, and it turned out that the reports were greatly exaggerated: new churches were beginning only every three weeks!¹

Some of these new churches, however, did not fit the mold of what one might traditionally think of as an Anglican church. To give one of the more famous examples, how many Goths do you know who go to church? (Maybe I should have asked first of all how many Goths you know.) Yet there is a thriving church especially for Goths in Cambridge. What about skateboarders? The Church of England has a church for skateboarders—not a ministry to skateboarders, which would not be uncommon, but a church of and for skateboarders.² New churches have apparently been coming into being for some years, functioning in pubs, coffee shops, community centers, schools and homes across the country.

The pace of growth was so rapid that, within a decade, it became clear that reality had overtaken *Breaking New Ground*. So a new report was commissioned, this one called *Mission Shaped Church*, presented to the General Synod and then published as a book in 2004.³ The introduction to the report reflects (with some bemusement) on the pace of change:

Only three fresh expressions of church were planted in 1978 . . . It is not clear why, by 1983, this number of church plants had trebled to nine, or in 1985 fifteen examples were begun. . . . The number of churches planted each year continued to rise, reaching about 40 per year in 1990.⁴

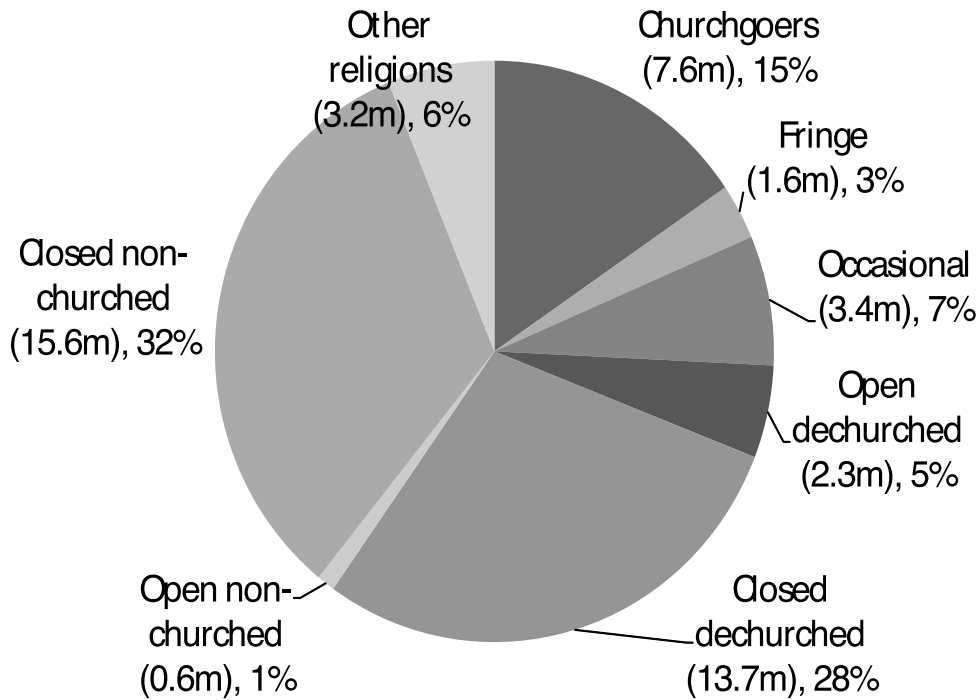
Mission Shaped Church did a number of things: it described some of the changes in UK society in the past fifty years that required a rethinking of what church is; it outlined a dozen kinds of “fresh expressions of church” that were springing up all over the country; it offered a robust Trinitarian theology of church planting and enculturation, shaped mainly by Lesslie Newbigin, David Bosch, Lamin

Sanneh and Vincent Donovan; and it offered some practical strategies for beginning fresh expressions of church. The report was also the origin of the term “fresh expressions,” which was coined because people could not agree what to call many of these new things: most were clearly not churches in any traditional sense, and most were not simply evangelistic outreach programs whose goal was to get people into traditional churches either.

Yet another helpful statistic in the report was about church affiliation in the UK, which provided a reality check for those who believed that existing churches could evangelize (or re-evangelize) the UK alone. (See the chart below which is slightly more recent—2006.) Those with a current connection to a church represented only 25% of the population. Fully one-third of the population was “dechurched,” meaning they used to attend church but do so no longer. Of these, only a small percentage—5% of the total—were “open,” meaning that they expressed an interest in exploring a return to church. The statistic that came as the biggest surprise, however, was that of the “non-churched,” i.e., those who had never had any contact with a church. Here too a third of the population of the UK checked the appropriate box. And of those, an even tinier proportion—1% of the whole—was “open” to checking out what church was about.

This report, to everyone’s surprise, turned out to be something of a best-seller, selling 23,000 copies (a record for a Church of England report—or maybe any church report) before it was made available free online. It also proved to be a catalyst to further experimentation. When the Fresh Expressions website was first set up shortly after the release of the report, people were invited to “register” their fresh expressions of church. Within a very short time, over 500 had done so.

Church-going in the UK, 2006



What is a Fresh Expression of Church?

The official definition of “fresh expressions” says:

- A fresh expression is a form of church for our changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church.
- It will come into being through principles of listening, service, incarnational mission and making disciples.
- It will have the potential to become a mature expression of church shaped by the gospel and the enduring marks of the church [one, holy, catholic and apostolic] and for its cultural context.⁶

One of my favorite examples is a Methodist church called "Somewhere Else," in Liverpool, England.⁷ It began when the newly appointed pastor, Barbara Glasson, decided to walk the streets for a year, getting to know people and trying to discern where God was at work. At the end of that

year, she began to bake bread for the community, and others slowly joined her. Over the course of the next year, with much baking (and eating!) of bread, a community came into existence where people told their stories, and the Gospel was shared in a natural, unforced way. A Bible study came into existence, people became Christians, and finally a worshipping community around the Eucharist was born. That is an archetypal story of how a “fresh expression of church” grew by means of “listening, service, incarnational mission and making disciples” into a “mature expression of church.”

Capitalizing Fresh Expressions

The year of the report (2004) was also the year that Fresh Expressions began to be spelled with capital initial letters, because that was the year when the Archbishops of Canterbury and York adopted the term, “the Fresh Expressions Initiative,” and Steve Croft, formerly head of an Anglican seminary in Durham, was appointed Team Leader of Fresh Expressions UK. One of the best things about this transition from grassroots movement to official Archbishops’ Initiative has been the determination of the official organization of Fresh Expressions (upper case) not to quench or control the grassroots spontaneity of fresh expressions of church (lower case). Instead, Fresh Expressions has successfully resourced the movement with whatever is needed, but has done so with a light touch and without creating an abundance of rules and procedures.

In particular, Fresh Expressions has drawn on the wisdom of practitioners to offer three levels of training for any who wish it. First of all, there is the ***Vision Day***, usually on a Saturday, which is an orientation to the whole idea of missional church. Then, for those who want to explore further, there is a course of six sessions called ***Mission Shaped Intro***. And finally, for those actually moving to *begin* a fresh expression of church, there is a year-long, hands-on course called ***Mission Shaped Ministry***.⁸ The whole process has been well thought out, in terms of

both the content and the teaching style, and is in constant process of revision and improvement. After all, a missional movement in a rapidly changing culture cannot afford to get stuck in a rut.

Changing Structures

Is this just the latest “flavor of the month” ministry gimmick, which will pass like so many more within a year or two? Rowan Williams, for one, thinks not; he sees it as the genuine spiritual response of a mission-minded church to the changing culture around it:

Essentially the Fresh Expressions programme is not simply about a kind of scattered set of experiments . . . it’s about that gradual, but I think inexorable, shift, the whole culture of our church that has been going on in the last few years, and which will undoubtedly continue to grow and develop.⁹

One sign that this is a change that will last has been alterations to the infrastructure of the denomination, what Rowan Williams has called “a principled and careful loosening of structures”—or, if you prefer, providing new wineskins for the new wine.¹⁰ For example, it is now possible to be assessed, trained and ordained specifically to “pioneer ministries.” In other words, you may not have the gifts or the interests to pastor a traditional Anglican church, but the church still acknowledges that it needs you. Or again, General Synod in April 2008 approved what is called a “Bishop’s Mission Order,” whereby a bishop can give formal approval to a fresh expression of church in his diocese that does not fit traditional ministry categories, and may even cross traditional parish boundaries. In fact, Steve Croft says one of the symbols of his ministry is a can of WD40—to help loosen up traditional procedures to make possible more of these fresh expressions.¹¹

Most of the evangelical Anglican seminaries in the UK have made significant changes in their programs in order to respond to the need for more missionaries and fewer pastors. For example, Ridley Hall in

Cambridge has appointed Dave Male, who was previously involved in starting a network church in the north of England known as The Net, as Tutor (i.e. Professor) in Pioneer Mission Training. Trinity College in Bristol, where I studied in the 1970's, has changed its whole structure in recent years to reflect an action-reflection model of formation. Holy Trinity in Brompton, London, where the Alpha Course began, has given birth to a new seminary in London known as St. Milletus' College, which offers a three year fully accredited program specifically to train for pioneer ministries. And Cliff College (a Methodist school) has begun offering a two year part-time MA degree to prepare people to work in fresh expressions of church. This too is a significant structural change within British churches, unlikely to be reversed any time soon.

The present team leader of Fresh Expressions UK is Bishop Graham Cray, who worked with David Watson in York in the 1970s. The Fresh Expressions website summarized his report to the Church of England's General Synod in February of 2010 like this:

“We face the long haul, not the latest fad,” he warned. Graham outlined three factors as crucial to Fresh Expressions' progress to date: a new imagination about the form or shape of church, the provision of relevant training resources, and an era of permission and encouragement by church leaders. “These three combine in a dynamic ecology. Parishes can imagine appropriate fresh expressions of church; they are not just permitted but encouraged to take the risk of starting one, and training is available to show them how.”

He gave his report in the wake of Tuesday's vote by Synod to continue to encourage fresh expressions of church, alongside more traditional forms of church, as the most promising mission strategy in a fast changing culture. Synod also pressed for a more imaginative policy

of recruitment, training and deployment of ordained and lay pioneer ministers. The motion encouraged the increasing use of Bishops' Mission Orders so that fresh expressions of church can play a full part in the life of each diocese.¹²

The only way in which one could argue that Fresh Expressions is just the new “flavor of the month” is the name and the organization itself. However, Steve Croft has stated as his hope that Fresh Expressions as an organization would cease to exist after ten years.¹³ Why? Because the intention is that by then the missional impulse in the Church of England will have become so much part of the denominational DNA that an office specifically to promote it would be redundant. It is a noble ambition.

Is This Just Church Planting by a New Name?

When people ask what the difference is between a church plant and a fresh expression of church, I generally answer, “Timing.” Traditional church planting usually begins with a small Christian community moving into an area, finding a property to rent or buy, and beginning worship services. That community then engages in different forms of mission and evangelism to its neighborhood, and seeks to grow. A fresh expression of church, on the other hand, is likely to start “further back”—thinking of all those “non-churched” folk for whom traditional church would be a huge cultural leap—with a discussion in a coffee shop or pub, or a specific outreach ministry, say to street people or to young people, or a regular family event for unchurched families. A fresh expression of church may or may not grow over time into a fully-formed church. Some may remain as a specific ministry, others may die after a time, and yet others may mature into churches. Whether what has begun is a church plant or a fresh expression of church depends in part on what seems most appropriate for the cultural context. As Rowan Williams says,

when asked if a particular fresh expression is really a church, “Let’s wait and see.” That is the right answer.

I was recently with a couple from the UK who are leaders in Fresh Expressions, and they suggested that the term “fresh expressions” will eventually be absorbed back into the broader term “church planting” once people have understood the new realities of church planting—that it no longer means putting up a neo-Gothic building in the suburbs and beginning services in hopes that “if you build it, they will come.”

A Provisional Assessment

I do not say this glibly: I do believe this movement has all the marks of a spontaneous work of the Holy Spirit. It is not a program, there is no regimentation, and there are no manuals. It is simply ordinary grassroots Christians passionately trying to find appropriate ways to reach their unchurched neighbors.

There is something mysterious about the beginnings of the fresh expressions movement, but in some measure there are historic reasons for it. After the Second World War, as many readers will know, there arose in the UK an extraordinary generation of Anglican evangelical teachers and evangelists, particularly John Stott, but also J. I. Packer, Michael Green, David Watson, David McInnes, and others. Baby boomers, who were at university in the 1960s and 1970s, were shaped by them and given confidence in the Gospel. Those baby boomers were entering their 30s in the 1970s and beginning to experiment in ministry. They are now entering positions of national leadership, not least as bishops and theological teachers, and are able to act as permission-givers to the next generation. So I believe that, in the providence of God, much of what is going on today is being led by the spiritual grandchildren of Stott and his contemporaries. This is a further reason to believe it is not a flash in the pan; it has been a long time growing.

It seems to me that the Church of England has on the whole responded judiciously, neither ignoring nor disowning the movement (on

the grounds that it is not “really Anglican”), nor trying to control it. There has been sensitive, low-budget resourcing and empowering. Rowan Williams in particular has lent his considerable authority to the movement and has modeled the kind of leadership that this kind of movement needs. We have a Ph.D. student at Wycliffe College, where I teach, wondering whether to make her thesis topic the history of how the institutional church and frontline missionaries have resolved their differences over the question of inculturation. There are many such stories from church history, most of them not very encouraging, but Fresh Expressions appears to be a generally positive one so far.

One specific area where Williams’ leadership has helped is in defusing conflict between traditional churches (now more often called “inherited” churches—a term which has fewer negative overtones) and fresh expressions. He has introduced the term “mixed economy” to the discussion in order to indicate that the church wants to encourage inherited churches to be missional as well as encouraging fresh expressions of church—not “either/or” but “both/and.” This is particularly reassuring to inherited churches, while challenging them at the same time. This bodes well for the future.

When people ask how fresh expressions of church and the emergent church are related, the best answer is that they are kissing cousins: both are trying to figure out how the church needs to relate to the growing missionary situation around it, and in both cases are arguing that “business as usual” is not going to work. In a video made during a visit by Williams to Calvin College in 2008, he was asked a question about emergent churches—and he gave an answer about Fresh Expressions! As editor of the recently published *The Missionary Letters of Vincent Donovan*,¹⁴ I am also interested that both movements look to Donovan as part of their inspiration. The main difference is that Fresh Expressions is firmly under the umbrella of existing denominations, their leadership, and their theology. This is a mixed blessing: good in that it

gives a solid framework within which to experiment, but a danger in that the traditional way of doing things can become the default position when things get difficult, as they will and do.

There are strenuous efforts to make this movement ecumenical. From the beginning, it has been a joint initiative of the Methodist Church and the Church of England (though the Church of England is clearly the older brother), and recently the United Reform Church became an official partner. Rowan Williams commented recently:

A couple of years ago, I was at a conference of evangelists and ‘pioneer ministers,’ many of them from independent and charismatic fellowships; and one senior and highly respected leader from this background said to me that he’d never expected to see the day when the Church of England was setting the pace for innovative mission strategies in the UK, but that he had to acknowledge that this was what was now happening.

He added modestly, “It was a generous judgment, perhaps more generous than accurate,” but acknowledges that “it reflects something of the profile and priority that mission initiatives have had in the thinking and action of our church in recent years.”¹⁵

So far, the indications are good that this movement will avoid the denominational competitiveness that has so often marred the mission field, and Williams’ kind of modesty makes it seem all the more achievable.

Are there weaknesses to this movement?

No movement is free from weaknesses and dangers, even those regarded as “spontaneous works of the Holy Spirit.” It seems to me that the main dangers in the Fresh Expressions movement have to do with speed or the lack of it—the demand for results on the one hand, and the need for great perseverance on the other. Here are some examples:

- Some fresh expressions of church begin too soon, and, rather than taking time to build bridges to the secular community, they simply draw together a community of disaffected Christians from different churches who are simply looking for a fresh experience of church and have little interest in mission. I asked the dozen or so people at a home meeting of one fresh expression why they were there. One after another, they said things like, “I was burned by my previous church, but this has become a family to me.” Not one spoke of mission or outreach. Such new churches easily become stagnant and give the movement a bad name. At the same time, those disillusioned Christians obviously do need pastoral care, with a goal to their becoming mature disciples and developing a new concern for mission.
- Similarly, the existence of a few fresh expression “franchises”—such as Café Church, a program for coffee shop-based fresh expressions, and Messy Church, which is perceived as a program (though the organizers resist the term) for non-churched families—makes it all too easy for a local church to say, “We need to do something new: let’s do a Messy Church or a Café Church,” instead of doing the hard, slow work of missional discernment—reading the culture, listening for the voice of God, and being prepared to do something no one else has ever done.
- Many fresh expressions of church are started among a particular population demographic: young people who skateboard, families who are into sports, urban professionals who frequent coffee shops, etc. So the movement opens itself to the same criticism as the church growth movement of which many critics have asked, “Whatever happened to the ideal of a community which truly represents a new multicultural Body of Christ?” *Mission Shaped Church* is aware of this criticism, and defends the homogenous unit approach—though acknowledging its limitations and wanting in time to grow beyond it.¹⁶

- There is as always a demand from some quarters for results: How many converts? How many adult baptisms? How much longer will you need funding? Pioneer missionary work is difficult to measure that way. I heard recently of one church plant in central England, in a poor neighborhood of a city, where it took several years' work before the team saw their first two converts. In the years that followed, one of the two returned to the drug culture from which she had come, became pregnant, and disappeared. A second one committed suicide. This is not the kind of heart-warming story that missionary magazines want; neither is it the kind of thing funding agencies like to hear. But it is authentic Gospel ministry of a kind that many traditional churches are incapable of undertaking.
- If this is missionary work for the long haul, how are the leaders, lay and ordained (50% of fresh expressions are started by lay people) to be sustained financially, emotionally and spiritually? Most will need to be tent-makers, which adds an extra layer of pressure to what is already a demanding form of ministry. And most historic denominations are not good at providing ongoing spiritual support for their regular pastors, let alone for church planters, tent-makers, and other pioneers, whose needs are that much greater. There could be a high fallout rate unless some support systems are worked out and sustained for the long haul.

Having laid out these dangers, I go back to my first assessment, that fresh expressions movement seems to me to be an authentic work of God, led at the grassroots by people with a passion for the Gospel and a vision for people, and among the institutional leadership by bishops who share that passion and are prepared to give permission and open doors. It is a unique and timely combination, one from which we in North America would do well to watch and learn.

¹ *Breaking New Ground: Church Planting in the Church of England* (London: Church House Publishing 1994), 1.

² “Legacy XS,” whose story is told in *Expressions: The DVD 1. Stories of Church for a Changing Culture*. (London: Church House Publishing, 2006).

³ *Mission Shaped Church* (London: Church House Publishing 2004).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁶ This definition is found in various places, including Steve Croft, “Mission Shaped Ministry for a Mission Shaped Church.” See <http://www.wycliffehall.org.uk/temp/Tracksp-spStevenspCroft.pdf>

⁷ The story is told in *Expressions: The DVD*.

⁸ See <http://www.missionshapedministry.org/>

⁹ Report of Proceedings, General Synod of the Church of England, February 2007, 187.

¹⁰ Report of Proceedings, General Synod of the Church of England, November 2005, 64.

¹¹ Personal conversation with the author.

¹² “Graham Cray praises a 'new imagination' about shape of future Church.” Online: <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/sites/default/files/general-synod-report-2010.pdf>

¹³ Personal conversation with the author.

¹⁴ John P. Bowen, ed. *The Missionary Letters of Vincent Donovan*. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011).

¹⁵ *Evangelism and Church Growth Initiative of the Anglican Communion Newsletter* (August 2010).

¹⁶ *Mission Shaped Church*, 104-105.

Emerging Missional Movements: An Overview and Assessment

Rick Richardson

An overview and assessment of emerging missional movements, and their impact on evangelicalism.

We face a moment of great opportunity for redefining and refocusing evangelicalism in important and healthy ways, while at the same time confronting a grave danger and the potential loss of a distinctively evangelical identity and witness in the world. Emerging evangelicals rightly reject past reductionisms that are rooted in modernist epistemologies generated by the Enlightenment, as well as in Christendom politics generated by the alliance of Church and State.¹ But these evangelicals are now in danger of embracing a new reductionism that is just as enslaved by overreaction to the past. I want to call all evangelicals, even those who want to distance themselves from the evangelical label, to embrace a new era of genuine and integral holism. By so doing, we can begin to bridge some of the longstanding intellectual,

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spiritual, emotional, denominational, and political divides in Church and society without losing the particular distinctiveness and contribution to the larger body of Christ that emerging evangelicals have to offer.

Being Missional

“Missional” has become a new code word and the basis for a claim to the moral high ground in the theology and praxis of contemporary ecclesiology. But what does it mean to be genuinely missional—to have the *missio Dei*, or mission of God, as the core identity of the Church? I will survey various current streams of missional church, and explore the specific challenges and debates the Church faces in becoming genuinely missional, rather than missional in rhetoric only.

So what does it mean to be missional? Probably the best place to explore how newer movements define and use the term “missional” is the blogosphere. That is where many emerging evangelicals are pursuing dialogue, trading ideas, and defining key concepts and paradigms. The blogosphere is the carrier of “viral” ideas that are spreading through the younger evangelical movements. Interestingly, in almost every such blog (short for weblog), writers are bemoaning the broad and undefined usage of the word “missional,” and yet a clear consensus on its meaning has crystallized.

A good proposal suggesting the various dimensions of the meaning of “missional” can be found at the website, *Friends of Missional*.² The following is my adaptation:

1. Missional is an identity and a way of life, and not a new program for outreach.
2. Becoming missional involves moving away from an attractional (“come and see”) model of ministry toward an incarnational (“go and be”) model of ministry. We live our faith and share our lives, rather than living our lives and, as some separate activity, sharing our faith.

3. Missional churches are focused on equipping everyday people for service and outreach in the world, rather than attracting larger and larger numbers of people who consume the goods and services the church dispenses.
4. Therefore, everyday Christians are not passive consumers sitting in the pew, but active members of a sacrificing and serving missionary force sent into the world.
5. Missional churches count disciples more than decisions.
6. Missional leaders multiply themselves, equipping other leaders for ministry and mission, rather than becoming the primary providers of the goods and services that church attendees consume.
7. Missional leaders are seeking to come to terms with the profound changes in epistemology that postmodern thinkers have posed.
8. Missional churches are preparing to live as marginalized communities in a larger society that no longer protects or embraces them.

This description makes clear that the current generation of missional movements formed as a reaction to the seeker church/mega church template for ministry.

In addition to these philosophical and strategic distinctives, missional churches also have certain theological emphases, including:

- Jesus and his disciples as the focus and model for Christian community and church life, rather than a focus on the Pauline epistles for instruction on how to be the Church.
- The kingdom of God as the content, focus, and form of the gospel, rather than a more narrow focus on the penal substitution model of the atonement as the primary or only way to understand the gospel.

In sum, missional churches confront the secular, individualistic, consumer oriented, therapeutic-style, business-imitating, market-driven,

building-obsessed church of the West by modeling an alternative kingdom community oriented on service and mission and the incarnational extension of Jesus' ministry, values, and presence into the world. These impulses have led to a new generation of torchbearers for the missional conversation.

Streams of the Emerging Missional Movement

The most recent expressions of the missional movement—and the groups that, I think, will dominate attention in the first decades of the new millennium—include at least five streams, the first four of which are identified by Tom Sine in his book *The New Conspirators*:³ the Emerging Stream, the Missional Stream, the Mosaic Stream, and Monastic Stream,⁴ and the Multi-Site Stream.

The Emerging Stream

Since the early 1990s, a group of young British, U.S., and Australian church leaders have engaged postmodern culture. They are relational and experiential, are involved in the arts, are more into narrative theology than propositional theology, and are focused on local and incarnational expressions of mission. The movement is broadly labeled “emerging church,” and its leaders include Brian McLaren,⁵ Tony Jones,⁶ Dan Kimball,⁷ and Spencer Burke.⁸

There is also a more theologically Reformed and less radical branch of the emerging church movement that is a case by itself and that deserves another paper to adequately tell its story and assess its importance. This Reformed branch is especially represented by Mark Driscoll,⁹ who was initially part of the Young Leader Network that brought the emerging church movement into prominence. Driscoll's Mars Hill Church in Seattle and Acts 29 national network of churches are the expression of this neo-Reformed sub-tributary of the Emerging Stream.

The Missional Stream

Influenced by the writings of Lesslie Newbigin,¹⁰ a group of Christian scholars founded The Gospel and Our Culture Network and began calling for a missional and prophetic engagement with Western culture. These leaders include Darrell Guder (Princeton Theological Seminary), George Hunsberger (Western Seminary), Lois Barrett (Eastern Mennonite University), Craig Van Gelder (Luther Seminary) and Alan Roxburgh (Allelon). Their books, especially *The Church Between Gospel and Culture*¹¹ and *The Missional Church*,¹² have stimulated missionally-oriented renewal in many mainline churches.

The Mosaic Stream

There are a growing number of multi-ethnic, urban-oriented churches that are embracing a gospel based on the theology of the kingdom. These same churches see evangelism, justice, and reconciliation as inextricably linked and core to the gospel. Leaders of the Mosaic Stream include John Perkins¹³ and Wayne Gordon,¹⁴ Efrem Smith and Phil Jackson,¹⁵ Erwin McManus,¹⁶ Brenda Salter McNeil,¹⁷ and David Gibbons.¹⁸

The Monastic Stream

The Monastic Stream is more diverse in age and ethnicity than the other streams, though it is presently being fueled by the growing interest of young people in global justice issues. For example, Scott Bessenecker's book *The New Friars*¹⁹ cites the communities connected to the Cairo garbage dumps. The groups associated with the Monastic Stream take their inspiration from past monastic movements and are forming communities that adopt a rule of life and often live among the poor. Leaders include Shane Claiborne,²⁰ John Hayes,²¹ and Pete Greig.²²

The Multi-Site Stream

The Multi-Site Stream has much continuity with the seeker church and purpose driven movements, even though many in this stream define themselves in opposition to those parent movements. More than the seeker movements, the Multi-Site Stream of the missional movement has focused on multiplying congregations through reproducing leaders. Although some of these groups are trying to grow mega-churches through video-casting their services—such as Lifechurch.tv in Oklahoma City—many are emphasizing that small is better, and are seeking to grow through new models of communal and team leadership and preaching. For instance, New Life Church in Chicago gathers its many site preachers weekly to prepare Sunday messages in community. Many of these groups demonstrate more theological continuity with traditional evangelical theology, but are being influenced by postmodern culture in their understandings of leadership, team, and the connective power of the Internet for communicating ideas and distributing resources. Leaders include Craig Groeschell,²³ Mark Driscoll, and Dave Ferguson.²⁴ This last stream is theologically and socially connected to the other four, and Alan Hirsch is becoming an important link between this movement and the others.

Challenges

Although there are many strengths in these churches, there are also dangers in this very creative ferment of thinking, practice and exploration. I want to mention six that I see as particularly pressing for many of these emerging missional streams: kingdom without God at the center; a cross without judgment; a church without the Spirit at the center; missional rhetoric without reality; an evangelism without words; and an epistemology without foundation.

Kingdom without God at the Center

Kingdom of God theology can become human centered and activist, thereby muting the truth that it is first of all God who brings his eschatological rule into human experience. When we become human centered and activist in our understanding of God's kingdom, we begin to confuse how exactly God is active in the *missio Dei*. We then either begin to baptize our particular political strategy or ideology as the true expression of the kingdom, or we undervalue the role of the individual.

This tendency has been especially prevalent among the emerging leaders who tend to be revisionist. This "revisionist" designation comes from recent analyses of the fragmentation of the emerging church into three distinct approaches:²⁵

1. Relevants, who are theologically conservative but culturally innovative and liberal. Dan Kimball and Mark Driscoll would tend to embrace this stance.
2. Reconstructists, who are seeking not only to redefine strategy but also are seeking to redefine ecclesiology—often emphasizing the church as alternative community in a more Anabaptist direction or the church as the restored community of the Biblical book of Acts. Darrel Guder and George Hunsberger have championed the more Anabaptist direction, and Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch have championed the perspective of the early church as a movement.
3. Revisionists, who are rethinking the basic theology of the church using more postmodern, socially constructionist epistemologies and with greater awareness of issues of social location and social power. Brian McLaren and Tony Jones would tend to champion this approach.

It is the revisionists who have tended toward a bottom up, and therefore sometimes anthropocentric, theological project. It should also be said

that the questions and challenges that the revisionists are facing head on are challenges that we all must face and address. The revisionists are often asking the right and crucial questions.

Cross without Judgment

Atonement theology can become focused on the cross as an example or the cross as a victory over evil, thereby ignoring the New Testament emphasis that the cross is an eschatological judgment on sin. I can appreciate Joel Green and Mark Baker's approach in *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross* as they seek to broaden the Biblical understanding of the atonement by reclaiming models other than penal substitution.²⁶ But their critique of penal substitution includes the assertion that it is no longer relevant for a postmodern world, regardless of how appropriate it was for a late medieval and modernist worldview. Their critique, then, amounts to a rejection of penal substitution, at least for our present time, and as a result they deemphasize themes of God's justice and judgment on sin and evil—which are important dimensions of the meaning of Jesus' death *for us*.

Church without the Spirit at the Center

Ecclesiology can become focused on following the way of Jesus rather than on becoming indwelt by Christ. We are not just following after Jesus; we are, in Christ, in a union that participates in the perichoretic indwelling of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The best and most comprehensive study of the emerging church to date is the study done by Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger called *Emerging Churches*.²⁷ They demonstrate without much critique that these churches tend to draw all of their categories for theology and practice from the Synoptic Gospels with the emphasis on the kingdom of God, the ethics of Jesus, and the call to follow Jesus. Many of these leaders and churches are reacting against their fundamentalist past and rejecting Pauline theological language about the death and resurrection of Christ and its meaning,

interpretations that they received from their church background. There is a great need for these leaders to return to Paul with their Synoptic Gospel lenses and questions, focusing on the ways in which Paul talks about the kingdom of God. Paul explores the inauguration of God's kingdom through his understanding of final judgment at the cross, the initiation of final resurrection in Jesus' resurrection, and the gift of the Holy Spirit as the foretaste and present appropriation of the kingdom that has yet to be consummated. This synthesis work will help integrate the present gap that exists for many of these leaders between the Jesus of the Synoptics and the Christ of Paul.

Rhetoric without Reality

We can embrace a missional rhetoric without demonstrating a missional reality in our life in the world. I face this temptation in the context of my own Anglican denomination, but I also see it in many emerging missional movements that are locked in reaction against a fundamentalist past, rather than being oriented toward authentically reaching outsiders to the faith and growing through conversion.

I am part of the Anglican Mission (AM) in the U.S. as a priest, though not as a decision maker. Our archbishop presides over the Anglican Church in Rwanda and our U.S. bishop sits on the Rwandan Council of Bishops. Anglican Mission has gone through two stages in its development, and it desperately needs to enter a third. First, AM was primarily focused on leaving the Episcopal Church in the U.S. during the period when the U.S. church was moving toward the ordination of gay and lesbian priests and the blessing of same sex marriages. As a result, the first stage of development involved protracted theological, political, and legal battles over orthodoxy, land, buildings, and claims to the higher moral ground. Then there was a period of consolidation and growth in which new churches began to be planted; as a result, the member churches of the Anglican Mission were no longer only former Episcopal churches. But in this stage, the effectiveness in reaching the unchurched

has still been fairly low, with most new members still consisting of “Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail.”²⁸ So we are still at a point where AM’s rhetoric for mission is high, given the need to justify leaving the denomination, but the actual practice of mission is still fairly embryonic. While we said that we have divided in order to reach the 145 million unchurched people in the U.S., our practice is still primarily to reach Christians who are on a journey to discover the liturgical, sacramental, ancient-future church. Todd Hunter in Southern California has embarked on an important experiment to go beyond this present “mission field,” but only time will tell how successful Anglican Mission will be at transcending the rhetoric and becoming genuinely missional.

Evangelism without Words

In reaction to the evangelical emphasis on evangelism as word, emerging missional movements have tended to turn evangelism into deed—either oriented on doing justice and service in the world ala McLaren²⁹ and Scandrette,³⁰ or oriented on the community being the community ala Stone³¹ and Kallenberg.³² We must lose neither the verbal core of evangelism, nor the essential unity between word, deed, and sign that is powerfully pictured throughout the New Testament. (See for instance Romans 15:18-19 and I Corinthians 2:2-5.) I am concerned at present that there is an exponential rise in a desire for social engagement, but a contrasting decrease in confidence and commitment to personal and verbal evangelism and proclamation.

Epistemology without Foundation

Finally, in response to the former marriage between evangelicalism and modernism, with its foundationalist epistemology and rationalist systematizing, emerging missional movements have tended to embrace a postmodern epistemology with its essentially subjectivist and socially constructionist assumptions. Certainly we need to think through epistemological issues carefully in light of the postmodern challenge. But

just as much, we need a new vision for how Christ and culture relate, and how the church missionally engages the cultures around and within the church with greater nuance and discernment. We need to get beyond H. Richard Niebuhr and his formulation of the Christ and culture problem, in which he asserts that churches must make one monolithic choice toward the dominant culture. Instead, we need to begin to embrace a far more nuanced discernment process that embraces specific gestures—whether gestures of rejection or embrace or revision—toward specific aspects of culture.

Common to many of these challenges is the tendency for advocates to reject a past reductionism and simply posit a new reductionism. We go from “halfistic” ministry focused on evangelism to “halfistic” ministry focused on social concern. We go from an over-emphasis on verbal communication to a sole dependence on actions. We go from a theology based solely on the Pauline literature, interpreted through an individualistic and Reformation shaped lens, to a theology based solely on the Synoptic Gospels and the kingdom ethics of Jesus. We go from a sweeping rejection of surrounding postmodern popular culture to an uncritical embrace of all things postmodern. We move from a conservative spiritualized and privatized reductionism to a liberal social and politicized reductionism.

Conclusion

I believe evangelicals stand at a crossroads in a number of critical ways. We face a moment of great opportunity and grave challenge. Postmodern philosophers have effectively deconstructed a naïve objectivism and foundationalism in epistemology, demonstrating that none of us can ever have a God’s eye view of reality or of Scripture, but that we are all socially and culturally located and influenced in the lenses through which we see reality. The modernist emphasis on rationality and individual autonomy and knowledge as fact has given way to a more

postmodern emphasis on knowledge as self-referential and pragmatically useful in the service of accruing and keeping social power.

The Church is being critiqued for its dependence on knowledge and words instead of being known for a focus on love and on deeds. A characteristic motto for our age might be: “Deeds not creeds!” In the broader Western world, the Church has also lost its preferential status as an arm of the State, and its perceived place as a welcome pillar of Western society. All forms of Christendom, including American forms of the alliance between Church and State, are under increasing legal and political attack.

Ironically, despite these evidences of a loss of influence, evangelicals have also increasingly attained more and more economic and political power, which has resulted from success in numbers and in income. Here the analyses of H. Richard Niebuhr³³ and Max Weber before him are relevant. Niebuhr suggests that success and entry into the middle class turn movements into denominations and turn winners in the religious economy into losers.³⁴ So evangelicalism is not only under the threat of accommodation in response to hostility, but also in response to success. Historically, success has been the more profound force for the loss of vitality, counter cultural distinctiveness, and social impact in and through the Church. In response to these larger currents of thought and social and historical forces, evangelicals will need to forge a nuanced but very courageous response if we are to continue to contribute, influence and pursue our mission with integrity and impact.

In this article, I have sought to model an engagement with the strengths and potential weaknesses of emerging missional movements. Too many people who have engaged in the debate about emerging missional movements have chosen a monolithic posture. Some leaders and authors make the claim that these movements are the bright postmodern future for evangelicalism after a long dark night of modernist dominance. Other leaders and authors claim that emerging

missional movements have sold their birthright for a mess of potage. Neither assessment is completely correct. Both are unhelpful and confusing. And both ultimately diminish discernment and polarize the Church. I hope that I have achieved in this paper a more thoughtful, nuanced, and balanced assessment of contributions and corrections for emerging missional leaders and others to consider and act upon.

The evangelical church has the opportunity to renew its evangelistic witness and missional impact in our day. It can provide a constructive influence in Church and culture in a globalizing world in desperate need of a new way forward. May God make it so, and may this article, offered as an attempt at critical but affirming conversation, contribute to our future together.

¹ Craig A. Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture: A Post-Christendom Perspective* (Brazos Press, 2006). Christendom, per Carter (p. 14) is the concept of Western civilization as having a religious arm (the Church) and a secular arm (civil government), both of which are united in their adherence to Christian faith—which is seen as the soul of Europe or the West. The essence of the idea is the assertion that Western civilization is Christian. Within that Christian civilization, the state and the Church have different roles to play, but, because membership is coterminous, both can be seen as aspects of one unified reality: Christendom.

² www.friendofmissional.org

³ Tom Sine, *The New Conspirators: Creating the Future One Mustard Seed at a Time* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008).

⁴ The following discussion of the Emerging, Missional, Mosaic, and Monastic Streams is adapted from Sine, *The New Conspirators*, 31-58.

⁵ Brian D. McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001).

⁶ Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones, eds., *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007).

⁷ Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003).

⁸ www.theooze.com

⁹ Mark Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformission Rev.: Hard Lessons from an Emerging Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006).

- ¹⁰ See: *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995); *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1986); *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1989).
- ¹¹ George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder, *The Church between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996).
- ¹² Darrell L. Guder and Lois Barrett, *Missional Church: A Theological Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998).
- ¹³ John Perkins, *Let Justice Roll Down*. (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1976).
- ¹⁴ Christian Community Development Association. www.cdda.org
- ¹⁵ Efrem Smith and Phil Jackson, *The Hip-Hop Church: Connecting with the Movement Shaping Our Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005).
- ¹⁶ Erwin Raphael McManus, *An Unstoppable Force: Daring to Become the Church God Had in Mind* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2001).
- ¹⁷ Brenda Salter McNeil and Rick Richardson, *The Heart of Racial Justice: How Soul Change Leads to Social Change* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).
- ¹⁸ Dave Gibbons, *The Monkey and the Fish: Liquid Leadership for a Third-Culture Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).
- ¹⁹ Scott Bessenecker, *The New Friars: The Emerging Movement Serving the World's Poor* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006).
- ²⁰ Shane Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006).
- ²¹ John B. Hayes, *Sub-Merge: Living Deep in a Shallow World* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2006).
- ²² Andy Freeman and Pete Greig, *Punk Monk: New Monasticism and the Ancient Art of Breathing* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2007).
- ²³ www.lifechurch.tv
- ²⁴ Community Christian Church in Naperville, IN. www.communitychristian.org
- ²⁵ Mark Driscoll, 'A Pastoral Perspective on the Emergent Church', *Criswell Theological Review*, 3 (2006), 87-93.
- ²⁶ Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament & Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).
- ²⁷ Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).
- ²⁸ Robert Webber, *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail: Why Evangelicals Are Attracted to the Liturgical Church* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985).

²⁹ Brian D. McLaren, *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007).

³⁰ Mark Scandrette, *Soul Graffiti: Making a Life in the Way of Jesus* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007).

³¹ Bryan P. Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007).

³² Brad J. Kallenberg, *Live to Tell: Evangelism in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002).

³³ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*. (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1929).

³⁴ Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

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Being Church:

A Wesleyan Perspective from Central Europe on “Emerging Church”

Achim Härtner

The theology behind the emerging church movement, as well as its practices, radically calls into question many assumptions of the established church. We may not choose to grant the young movement’s analyses and assessments on all points, but we will do well to look closely and learn from them.

The Phenomenon of “Emerging Church”

The 20th century’s progress-oriented rationalism has given way to a new openness to religion and spirituality; in the central European context, one speaks of the “return of religions” or of a “post-secular society.”¹ It is primarily newer religious groups (rather than established churches) that are profiting from the development. One of these—a far-reaching international discussion that has been developing among Christians of different traditions—has been given the catch-all title,

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“Emerging Church.” Given its diversity of approach, some representatives prefer to speak of an “Emerging Conversation” or of “Emerging Churches” rather than of one Emerging Movement. Part of the movement has networked and organized internationally under the name “Emergent (Church),” though other parts of the movement have seen this as capitulation.²

Even though it is decentralized and heterogeneous, we may legitimately speak of a movement because of its large number of publications as well as its resonance in the wider church world. The theology behind it, as well as its practices, radically calls into question many assumptions of the established church. Solutions are suggested that make Christians in established evangelical churches listen up, not least because these solutions often re-present confidently and dynamically reshaped elements of their own tradition.³ We may not choose to grant the young movement’s analyses and assessments on all points, but we will do well to look closely and learn from them. Just as Paul saw himself in his time as “debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians” (Rom 1:14), we as contemporary Christians are “debtors both to the modern and postmodern generation,” and are called to proclaim the gospel in our time (Rom 1:15).

A New Way of Being Church

What are we talking about when we say “Emerging Church”? A typical example may be found in Michael Frost’s *Exiles*:

For example, I remember meeting Shaun Tunstall, from the city of Brisbane on the east coast of Australia, who, in his mid-twenties and living with dyslexia and ADD, finally decided he would stop attending church. He couldn't sit still during church services, and he wasn't wired to take in information from half-hour sermons. He wasn't getting anything out of the meetings, even though he had been attending church weekly since he was

born. Now, flushed with frustration and early adult rebellious energy, he decided to stop going to church. Instead, Shaun decided that he would take his powerboat out on Brisbane's Pine River and go waterskiing on Sunday mornings. He gathered a group of friends, some Christian, some not, and headed off to the river for a relaxing day of waterskiing. But after reversing the trailer down the boat ramp and edging the craft into the water, he became wracked by guilt. It was a beautiful Sunday morning, and every week of his life he had been in church. Now here he was about to go waterskiing. He expected one of God's vengeful lightning bolts to burst from the clear, blue sky and sink his boat at any minute. So, in an attempt to salve his conscience, he grabbed a pocket Bible from his car and announced to his friends that he would like to mark the day by reading a short passage of Scripture. You can imagine his friends' surprise. After reading the shortest psalm he could find, he reflected briefly about the beauty of God's grace and then asked the guys if there was anything he'd like them to pray about. Stunned by these proceedings, his friends, especially the non-Christian ones, eventually offered up needs they had that Shaun could pray about. Then they went waterskiing all day. Next week, twice as many people turned up. Shaun read a brief passage, shared a few thoughts about it, and asked for prayer points. He did this for weeks. The numbers kept increasing, and soon he had a community of over fifty people who would meet by the river, share a short devotion, pray together, and enjoy God's creation. Soon, people started becoming Christians. After a while, they started breaking for lunch at some picnic tables by the Pine River, where they would break bread and drink wine and remember Jesus' sacrificial love. They shared a meal together and took up a collection each week and gave the money to the poor. They took it upon themselves to become the

“chaplains” to the general river community. Now they are known as the people who tow broken-down boats back to the boat ramp. They provide free parts and repairs for other boats that have given up the ghost. They eat together, they serve the poor, they share Jesus with others, they celebrate the Lord's Supper, they serve their general community. And all along Shaun's parents and church friends are hoping that he'll come to his senses and start attending church again!”⁴

Emergence Theory and Emergent Church

The Emerging Church movement builds on emergence theory. The term “emergence”⁵ refers, in the natural and social sciences as well as the humanities, to a phenomenon in which the qualities of the whole cannot be explained in terms of its component parts and their qualities. Because the whole is more than the sum of its parts (Aristotle), unexpected and qualitatively new aspects emerge. Emergence phenomena are observable, for example, in chemical reactions. The qualities (aggregate state, molecular weight, stability, etc.) of a newly produced chemical substance can diverge sharply from those of the initial materials, sometimes producing materials with entirely unpredictable consistencies. Animate nature displays emergence phenomena to an even higher degree. Cell clusters join together to produce higher forms of life suited to their various living conditions. In the human brain, millions upon millions of nerve cells are networked together, and therefore capable of accomplishing highly complex functions (such as the coordination of movements and creative thought). The Australian philosopher Samuel Alexander (1856-1938) and the British psychologist Conway Lloyd Morgan (1852-1936) used human consciousness as an example for a jointly developed emergence theory, interpreting this to be a phenomenon that surfaces suddenly in the development of species and cannot be predicted in advance based on our knowledge of the structure of organic material.

German sociologist Niklas Luhmann's (1927-1998) work has served as a foundation for the incorporation of emergence theory into the social sciences. His thought interweaves societal theory, communication theory, and evolutionary theory. According to Luhmann, a system depends upon its boundary to the outside world, which is tenuous: Combining elements from their complex environments into a previously nonexistent identity, complex self-organized (autopoietic) systems form unpredictably and independently in the interplay of their elements.⁶ Their flat hierarchy enables quick changes in community formation, which aim to adapt them optimally to their respective conditions. According to Luhmann, the quality of communication between the parties involved is decisive for the success of self-organizing systems.⁷

In both the theories named, one finds resonances of the literature on "Emerging Church." The term was coined in 1970 by Bruce Larson and Ralph Osborne,⁸ and since the 1990s it has become a kind of standard bearer of longing for new forms in which to express Christian existence.⁹ Emerging Church means "Church breaking in" or "Church surfacing," and witnesses to the lasting call to the church of Jesus Christ to develop anew in ever-changing contexts. The emergent community is viewed as a living organism, and the dynamism of growth and change is given precedence over the development of structure. The Emerging Church movement is still in an identity-seeking phase. Interested people from all parts of the world and the church contribute to an interdisciplinary discourse in an open process of innovative self-organization.¹⁰ Fabian Vogt describes it thus: "Its distinguishing characteristic is thousands of Christian men and women who simultaneously contribute their knowledge, experience, longings and ideas to this new process."¹¹

Emerging Churches as Churches of Postmodernism

The Emerging Church movement began in the English-speaking world (the UK, Australia, USA, Canada, South Africa, New Zealand) as a reaction to societal changes in the western world—changes that are often subsumed under the heading “postmodernism.”¹² In this context, postmodernism is usually understood as an ongoing, historic spiritual and cultural epoch that will increasingly overlay and ultimately replace the modern era.¹³ The postmodern generation is described as being defined by individualization and pluralization, which are connected with a lived focus on the here and now. Further markers are a willingness to look beyond the rational as well as a radical skepticism regarding overarching models that explain the world (metanarratives).¹⁴ One of the movement’s leading thinkers, Brian McLaren, observes, “...if you have a new world, you need a new church. You have a new world.”¹⁵

Various expressions of the Emerging Church share a growing dissatisfaction with the basic assumptions and lived reality of churches in the western world, which are seen as being one-sidedly influenced by Enlightenment modernity. So far, analyses and assessments of this type are made with great confidence, and the established churches are being told that they are stuck in a deep crisis of relevance and credibility. Their conventional offerings, they are told, speak to a tiny fraction of the population; younger generations in particular lack any sense of resonance with their offerings. Even extravagantly arranged alternative “seeker services” for those who are distant from the church are judged to be incapable of reaching the postmodern generation. Churches are losing ground internally as well, because younger Christians particularly are described as feeling caught in a growing chasm between the postmodern culture around them and an outmoded church culture. In *The Shaping of Things to Come*, Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch arrive at a sobering, even devastating, assessment of traditional churches and their potential: “We must admit that Christendom, particularly its ecclesiological and its

missiological manifestations, amounts to something of a failed experiment.... The answer to the problem of mission in the West requires something far more than reworking a dated and untenable model. It will require that we adopt something that looks far more like the early church in terms of its self-identity (ecclesiology) and its core task in the world (missiology).¹⁶

Against the backdrop of radically deconstructing existing forms of church, many representatives of the Emerging Conversation see themselves as trailblazers for a church of the future. A common impetus is the desire to rediscover Christian faith under the conditions of postmodernism, and to live it authentically. This involves translating the missionary zeal of first-century Christians authentically into the twenty-first century, as well as finding new, appropriate expressions of communally lived faith. The movement's leading thinkers emphasize tirelessly that the success of this enterprise hinges on finding a way to engage constructively and innovatively with postmodern everyday life, as well as with oft-reviled cultural changes.¹⁷ The individualization and pluralization of lived worlds and the competition between claims to truth and meaning in the globalized world must not be seen only as a threat, but must deliberately be seized as opportunities.¹⁸ Frost and Hirsch describe the decisive change in consciousness this way: "What is needed ... is the recognition that people today are searching for relational communities that offer belonging, empowerment, and redemption."¹⁹

Their words reveal an experience-based orientation toward religious needs, concerned with the pragmatics of ordinary life. In responding to the religious search of the postmodern generation, they claim that it is essential to dissolve strict demarcations between "holy" and "profane," in order to win back the culture-shaping power of the Christian faith in the postmodern world. This requires nothing less than a radical paradigm shift: "Taken as a sociopolitical reality, Christendom has been in decline for the last 250 years, so much so that contemporary

Western culture has been called by many historians (secular and Christian) the *post-Christendom* culture. Society, at least in its overtly non-Christian manifestation, is “over“ Christendom.... While in reality we are in a post-Christendom context, the Western church still operates for the most part in a Christendom mode.”²⁰

In the literature and in Internet forums, it is frequently stressed that the necessary paradigm shift is not a shift to *one* unilateral model for community or church. Instead, the Emerging Conversation seeks to spark earnest questions about God’s purposes in each community, each specific context. What is needed is a fundamentally new spiritual orientation, not a ready-made blueprint for the church of the future. Dan Kimball observes: “Instead of one emerging-church model, there are hundreds and thousands of models of emerging church.... There’s no one-size-fits-all way of doing things, because you can’t box-in the emerging church. It will be made up of large churches, small churches, and home churches, multiracial and intercultural churches, inner-city, rural, and suburban churches.... The emerging church is more of a mindset than a model.”²¹ Several important characteristics and values of this mindset are important to keep in view.

Theological Foundations and Characteristics of the Emerging Church Movement

A New Radicalism in Devotion to Jesus

Emergent communities strive to live according to Jesus’ example. According to Bolger and Gibbs,

Emerging churches are communities that practice the way of Jesus within postmodern cultures. This definition encompasses nine practices. Emerging churches (1) identify with the life of Jesus, (2) transform the secular realm, and (3) live highly communal lives. Because of these three activities, they (4) welcome the stranger, (5) serve with generosity, (6) participate as

producers, (7) live creatively as created beings, (8) lead as a body, and (9) take part in spiritual activities.²²

The participation in the kingdom of God, oriented by biblical promise and proclaimed and represented by Jesus, is the movement's theological pivot. God's reconciling and redeeming work is to be present in church communities and their surroundings in a way that can be directly experienced. It is essential to become sensitive to the things God is already doing in the world, and to join actively in this work.²³

Most emergent churches are theologically evangelical, assuming a literal understanding of Scripture as well as God's shaping of every area of life. These doctrinal convictions are, in practice, highly consequential and binding. Many representatives of the movement demand a new radicalism in Christ-following, an unbridled faith that expresses itself in a life oriented toward mission and founded on an unqualified trust in God. This radical life is presented in the work of "Jesus Freaks"²⁴ in Europe's metropolitan areas, which is concerned especially with stranded youth, or in different parts of the world in upcoming spiritual communities as the New Monastics.²⁵ Frost and Hirsch describe this new radicality in paradoxical terms: "While we admit to being unashamedly radical (in the true sense of that word) in our reexamination of *everything* in relation to standard church practice, we are nonetheless quite deeply committed to the historic, orthodox Christian faith."²⁶

Thus being postmodern and being bound to tradition, as well as being deconstructive and reconstructive, do not have to be seen as contradictions. Emergent communities search for ways of rediscovering the wide stream of Christian tradition and making it fruitful in fresh new ways. A high level of radical commitment is inseparably bound up in this. In *Radical Outreach*, George Hunter describes what this can look like. The book contains many examples of communities that, in their devotion to Christ and to the people entrusted to them, have been willing to risk everything in order to turn toward the oppressed and live with them as

the Body of Christ.²⁷ The demand for Christianity and church work to be culturally relevant is continually restated. Evangelism should not be reduced to the offering of personal salvation, but must include the proclamation of God's claim to Lordship over the world. One of the formative personalities in the North American Emerging Church movement, Erwin McManus (MOSAIC/Los Angeles), emphasizes two significant markers of the church of Jesus Christ in *An Unstoppable Force*: its decisiveness and its willingness to change.²⁸ Early Christians had to respond to diverse cultural challenges. Many New Testament passages make it clear that from the very beginning Christianity had to confront cultural questions (the apostles' council on the question of mission to the Gentiles: the question of handling meat offered to idols, the ordering of worship services, etc.). McManus states:

Whether a church decides to relocate to an environment in which it can thrive or to adapt to the environment that is emerging around them, change is inevitable. It must not be seen as a necessary evil but a God-given tool. For the first-century church, difficult and challenging environments caused her to thrive. The first-century church erupted out of a context of persecution. The church is designed to thrive on the edge of change and in the center of history. The church was designed to thrive in our radically changing environments.²⁹

Rediscovering Jesus Christ's Great Commission

The different expressions of the Emerging Church movement share a common emphasis on moving today's practice of Christ's Great Commission to the center of the holistic orientation for both the individual and the community. Mission is the norm, not the exception, of Christian existence.³⁰ Emergent communities understand themselves as "missional," which is to say, shaped at the heart of their being, by God's mission. His turning toward us lovingly in Jesus Christ is to be made

known and present to all people. Missional communities invest completely in the work of calling people into discipleship to Christ, integrating them into committed Christian community, and equipping them to serve their neighbors. This is less a question of “missionary” strategies and one-time events, and more a question of continued effort to understand mission and evangelism incarnationally. What a community is and does, not simply what it says, is seen as decisive for the communication of the gospel; and Christ’s incarnation is understood as the model. Because God became flesh in Jesus, the missional church must in turn incarnate Christ’s love. It deconstructs itself so that it can flow into the broken and abandoned dimensions of society, representing Christ among those who do not yet know him. This incarnational ecclesiology leads to decentralized, minimally hierarchical structures. Home churches and cell groups form the heart of emergent congregations, and the concern for mission is shared among all. Kimball asks: “How do you measure success? Real success is whether or not our worship gatherings and church as a whole are producing disciples—disciples who are loving God more, and loving people more (Matthew 22:37-39).³¹ The “body language of the body of Christ” in everyday life carries great weight for the credible proclamation of the gospel.³² Thus people are to be led to Jesus through friendship and encounter and through direct assistance in life and community, rather than through programmatic emphases like seeker services that are aimed at particular target groups.

Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois (well-known even in the German-speaking world) works on a megachurch, target-group model. At the time of its founding in the 1970s, “Un-churched Harry and Mary” were identified as a typical un-churched man and woman waiting to be won to faith in Christ.³³ To this end, one did surveys and analyses, and adjusted the church’s offerings continually on the basis of their results—right up to today. The realm of the

Emerging Church movement works much differently, largely rejecting need-based target group models. Doug Pagitt, leader of Solomon's Porch in Minneapolis, states the motto of his congregation: "No guns, please – this is a target-free zone."³⁴ Such a formulation remains to some extent an ideal, however, since every congregation implicitly or explicitly attracts certain groups of people, while others still feel unwelcome. The local church that is actually "open for all" remains illusory.

In emergent churches, the primary concern is not winning people for membership in the congregation or church, but integrating them into the larger mission of Jesus Christ. In order to achieve this, the following is unavoidable: the gospel must be contextualized in order to reach postmodern people. McManus emphasizes that a congregation that wants to do evangelism in its cultural surroundings must not only understand and affirm that culture, but must at the same time be actively involved in shaping it. The church must take on the function of an "architect of culture."³⁵

McManus has in mind a culture of unfolding life determined by faith, love, and hope wherein the divine potential latent in every person is able to find the fullest possible expression.³⁶ The Emerging Church does not see itself as primarily required per se to meet the expressed wishes of individuals, religious or otherwise. McManus reminds us that "the phenomenon of church shoppers has profoundly shaped the contemporary church. The entire conversation is not about relevance but convenience. The focus is not on serving the world; the church itself became the focal point.... This move has made pastors the only minister, while making the member the only recipients of ministry. What is lost in this process is an army of healers touching the planet."³⁷

Thus, the church must become, in the famous words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a "church for others." As McManus reminds us: "We are the church, here to serve a lost and broken world."³⁸ Pro-active Christian witness in church and society is intended to change not only individuals

but their surroundings as well. This leads us to the next characteristic: the emphasis on holistic sanctification.

*Holistic Sanctification*³⁹

While traditional congregations revolve largely around *belonging* (membership, ministry, committees, etc.), emergent churches focus on *changed lives* (recognizable Christianity in day-to-day life, a missional presence in society).⁴⁰ Methodist theologian Elaine Heath therefore characterizes the Emerging Church movement as a “new holiness movement,” and speaks of a new, “mystic-way of evangelism.”⁴¹ The conviction that God claims and works in all dimensions of life (body, mind, soul) and in all arenas of life (family, work, recreation, use of property and resources, etc.) is theologically decisive. No separation between “spiritual” and “worldly” expressions of life can be allowed; authenticity and integrity are central values for emergent communities. They are concerned with “a place where we focus on the holistic formation of people in harmony with God in all arenas of life, people who seek to live in the way of Jesus in every relationship, every situation, every moment.”⁴² Here too society plays an important role: the sanctification of lives has a social as well as an individual dimension. McLaren forcibly makes this point in *The Secret Message of Jesus*,⁴³ emphasizing the revolutionary side of Jesus of Nazareth and his proclamation of the in-breaking reign of God. In *Everything Must Change*,⁴⁴ he goes a step further, taking the world’s great challenges into view, and focusing on four main problem areas: the prosperity crisis, the equity crisis, the security crisis and the spirituality crisis.⁴⁵ He reflects on these four crises in light of the proclamation of the in-breaking kingdom of heaven, and develops from this angle a kind of new “theology of hope.”⁴⁶ He rejects individualistic ideas of salvation, as well as the health-and-wealth gospel, as well as a darkly resigned, end-times eschatology. He exposes the dominant Western societal system with its fixation on immediate individual satisfaction as a “suicide machine” (Leonard Sweet),

driven by a “destructive framing story.” McLaren demands a radical turning, an “alternative narrative” (N.T. Wright), one that is committed to Jesus’ promises about the in-breaking reign of God that brings with it a “revolution of hope.” McLaren sees the local church (the beloved community) as the place of paradigmatic life, where others can observe and concretely experience justice, peace, equality, and compassion. This brings us to another feature of the Emerging Church movement – its social location, especially the small group. There is an implicit ecclesiology to be explored behind this understanding.

Christian Life in Networks – “We Are the Church!”

Representatives of the Emerging Church emphasize that while modernism placed the autonomous reason of the individual at the center of attention, the postmodern generation has a new interest in interpersonal relationships and life-giving community.⁴⁷ Shaun Thunstall’s work in Brisbane makes clear what an essential role interpersonal relationships and the leader’s personality played in the young emergent community. In *Planting Missional Churches*, Stetzer advises the church to be “unashamedly spiritual” and to underscore the role of community for spiritual formation and growth: “Community will be a central value in all organizations of the future, whether secular or sacred. This is good news for the church because community is central to its mission. Also, spiritual growth best takes place in community. . . . In spiritual things people long to belong and are hungry for a we-centered approach to growing spiritually rather than a me-centered approach.”⁴⁸ Karen Ward goes even further, and says, “As we live together in the way of Jesus within community, we see ourselves participating in the very life of God. As God is the source of all relationality, the relationships that are guided by the Spirit in community are reflective of the inner relationship that happens in God, even if reflected ‘in a mirror dimly.’”⁴⁹

In Emerging Communities, faith-sharing does not happen in strategically planned evangelistic events, but in day-to-day life together,

between believers and non-believers, in families as well as in neighborhoods and other communal forms of living. This reality is an expression of the basic conviction that what is central to the communication of the gospel today is not the passing on of objective knowledge and teaching, but rather life-changing experience and viable community.⁵⁰ The faith spreads like a “contagious health”—as in the saying, “The Christian faith is more caught than taught.”

The Emerging Church Movement seeks to find new and fresh meaning in the New Testament image of the church as the “body of Christ.”⁵¹ Rick Warren, leader of the Saddleback Valley Community Church in California, writes: “For twenty-five years I’ve taught pastors that the church is a Body, not a business. It is an organism, not an organization! It is a family to be loved, not a machine to be engineered, and not a company to be managed.”⁵² The church understood as the body of Christ—moving, breathing, needing rest—is made up of different people, who are dependent on one another at different levels.⁵³ An organism reacts to its environment and is called healthy when it grows and is capable of adapting to changing conditions. For the Emerging Church, it is not church buildings or events, such as worship services that define church. According to Kimball, the church is those who follow Jesus: “The church is the people of God who gather together with a sense of mission (Act 14:27).”⁵⁴ The church community is understood organically, made up of responsible human beings who want to live in relationship to God and to one another. In this organism, all the members are involved in the development of the whole body, with differing functions to be sure, but always with vital significance. In the Emerging Church movement, therefore, existing hierarchies in church leadership are regarded skeptically or rejected, and the demand for a “community from below” is heard.

The necessity of communal leadership is accepted, but a wholesale re-thinking of this leadership is required: “The power of

changing something does not rest with an elected or self-appointed governing body, but only with the body as a whole. Through functional and accepted feedback structures, everyone shares equal rights and involvement. If there were a narrowly defined leadership structure, most of the qualitative markers of emerging church would be lost.”⁵⁵ The key word “organism,” furthermore, points out the way in which church work is oriented toward spiritual gifts. God has entrusted Christians with gifts, which are to be responsibly used. Christians are to serve one another with the gifts God has given them. Emergent communities seek and create opportunities to discover each person’s spiritual gifts and to develop them in service toward others. Fabian Vogt describes this vision of church as a community of difference: “Churches of the future will not be narrowly stratified insider clubs, but will grasp the diversity of humans as a gift of God. They will not be primarily marked by the sympathy of common interests, but by real community, which also includes those who stand at the margins. Knowledge, power and expertise will not be attached to single individuals, but will be newly discovered as the strength of all participants.”⁵⁶

Darrel Guder points out what the Emerging Church movement sees as the established church’s decisive ecclesiological misunderstanding and writes, “Popular grammar captures it well: you ‘go to church’ much the same way you might go to a store. You ‘attend’ a church, the way you attend a school or theater. You ‘belong to a church,’ as you would a service club with its programs and activities.”⁵⁷ Guder connects this point with Reformation history:

The churches shaped by the Reformation were left with a view of the church that was not directly intended by the Reformers, but nevertheless resulted from the way that they spoke about the church. Those churches came to conceive themselves as “a place where certain things happen.” The Reformers emphasized the “marks of the true

church” at that place where the gospel is rightly preached, the sacraments rightly administered, and (they sometimes added) church discipline exercised.⁵⁸

By contrast, the Emerging Church movement does not see church as an “attractive” location in which religious wares and services are offered and consumed. Instead, the movement emphasizes that the Christian community consists of people whose lives are centered around Jesus Christ, and whose self-understanding is secure—“We are the church!”⁵⁹—as they are sent out into the world. Kimball asserts programmatically that, “A foundational and critical challenge for the emerging church will be teaching people that *they* are the church and that that don’t simply attend or go to one.”⁶⁰

An essential feature of ecclesiology within the Emerging Conversation is its “catholicity,” i.e., faith in the “one holy, universal, and apostolic church.” In their own descriptions of themselves, emergent communities in English-speaking areas use words like post-evangelical, post-liberal, post-protestant, post-denominational, and post-confessional.⁶¹ In other words, many Christians today are satisfied to belong to Jesus and to be in a community, without wearing the label of a brand-name church. Doctrinal differences that lead to the splintering of the “body of Christ” in confessions and denominations recede into the background, while life in discipleship to Christ is emphasized as central. It is only in the cooperation of different, newer and older Christian traditions that emergent churches can unfold in fruitful, life-bringing ways.⁶² McLaren points the way toward this understanding in *A Generous Orthodoxy*.⁶³ In terms of its expressions, the church of the future must not fear contact with the wide and varied stream of theological tradition, but must draw creatively from it.⁶⁴ He is frequently quoted as saying that “to be a Christian in a generously orthodox way is not to claim to have the truth captured, stuffed, and mounted on the wall. It is rather to be in a loving (ethical) community of people who are seeking the truth (doctrine)

on the road of mission...and who have been launched on the quest by Jesus, who, with us, guides us still.”⁶⁵ This theological breadth has earned McLaren both affirmation and criticism, which, relative to biblical truth, lead some to accuse him variously of relativism, eclecticism, and treason.

In the Emerging Church, the word “community” is used in place of “congregation.”⁶⁶ Some authors go a step further and draw on anthropologist Victor Turner, speaking of *communitas* (community transcending boundaries), in order to emphasize that the social embodiment of the Christian faith is essentially unfinished and in need of completion. In emergent communities, small groups are the heart of church life. They form highly committed spiritual and social networks among participants. This principle is most highly developed in what has been called the New Monasticism, which is attracting primarily young people.⁶⁷ In England they are called “Boiler Rooms,” in Canada “Urban Monasteries,” in Sweden “Re:Aktor.” German-speaking examples are the Jesus Freaks, ICF/Zürich and KUBIK/Karlsruhe.⁶⁸ The “24/7 Prayer” movement centers on prayer with and for one another. It has adopted a Moravian model, and follows the motto: “Pray as though everything depends on God, and live as though everything depends on us.”⁶⁹ There are new attempts at communal life in the Roman Catholic realm as well.⁷⁰ There are decidedly ecumenical communities, such as the Laurentius Convent in Wethen, Germany and the “Ecumenical Forum BRIDGE“ in Hamburg, Germany, supported by more than fifteen different congregations.⁷¹

In many communities, the role played by small groups is greater than that of the joint worship service. In light of calendar conflicts caused by career, family, and diverse interests, small groups are not restricted to meeting in a physical space. Especially in metropolitan areas, there are also virtual meetings by way of electronic media. The World Wide Web’s interactive ways of thinking and communicating (Web 2.0) serve as a model for the realization of committed community within

postmodern culture, especially when it is not possible for people to meet in person. The various networks of small groups serve as a hub for people, giving them contact and connection with one another (e.g., worship services and devotionals by audio/video podcast, virtual prayer groups in chat rooms, Internet forums and blogs not constrained by space and time, and contact over e-mail or by text message). MOSAIC in Los Angeles provides an impressive example in its open poetry platform “urbanpoets,” where spiritual experiences are shared in poetic form.⁷²

The church as a “community of difference” expresses itself in the life of small groups as well as in the worship service, which is often understood as a kind of “marketplace,” in which the various small groups meet and orient themselves newly toward God.⁷³ A final feature of the Emerging Church movement is its understanding of spirituality and worship service, to which we now turn.

Vintage Faith and the Worship Service

The expression “a generous orthodoxy” refers to a reorientation not only of content but also of form. It presents an image of enormous diversity and vitality. What immediately stands out is a re-sacralizing of “post-seeker-sensitive” (Dan Kimball)⁷⁴ worship services and community events, which contrast sharply with Willow Creek-style seeker services. This begins with the choice and design of the meeting space. Instead of desacralizing church space in order to give those who are distanced from the church as few thresholds to cross as possible, worship space is consciously a *heteros topos* in the French philosopher Michel Foucault’s sense.⁷⁵ He speaks of “special, separate” spaces in public life (memorials, cemeteries, museums, churches), which are specifically different from everyday spaces and environments (the working world, domestic world, consumer world).⁷⁶

Locations reserved for communal celebration and prayer are darkened and lit quietly by candles, not unlike the Roman catacombs.⁷⁷ Modern sound and light technologies may not be used at all, and if they

are, only in order to enhance concentration and contemplation. In conscious contrast to fast-moving everyday life, external stimuli are reduced. The aim is to slow down participants' sense of time: this is a place in which to take time for God, time for ourselves, time for the community. It is a time to be truly "spiritual," experiencing long-lasting change by the gospel's message. Large, venerable cathedrals take on a new attraction, as do city churches in which "time has accumulated."⁷⁸ This sets these spaces apart from other spaces (*heteroi topoi*).

Churches that meet in school buildings, factories, or gyms furnish their rooms in order to achieve a "mute sacralization" (Michel Foucault), which intuitively and deeply speaks to people. Kimball describes the change in approach as follows: "Many of the very things that we removed from our churches because they were stumbling blocks to seekers in previous generations are now the very things that are attractive to emerging generations."⁷⁹ It is no longer the band or a glass pulpit that forms the visual center of the postmodern worship service. Instead, it is the cross. Seating arrangements are not modeled after the anonymity of movie theaters, but rather of living rooms, with comfortable seats arranged to invite conversation. All this is motivated by the conviction that people attending worship services should not feel themselves as visitors or audience, but rather as participants. The key word for Emerging Worship is "vintage faith."⁸⁰ This means that symbols, pictures, and ordered time are newly prized, and thus traditional spiritual forms such as readings from the Psalms, sustained silence, communal prayer, and frequent celebration of the Eucharist are all experiencing a renaissance.⁸¹

Postmodern forms of worship have sparked extensive literature. What is often described as the most promising model is referred to as "sensory worship."⁸² This is distinguished by open forms of expression, which encourage communication and interaction among all participants by following a nonlinear structure.⁸³ Kimball consciously avoids speaking

of a “worship service,” preferring the term “worship gatherings.” He notes, somewhat sarcastically,

Most people view the weekend worship service as a place where we go to get service done to us by ‘getting our tanks filled up’ at the service station. In automobile terms, you could say it is our weekly fill-up. . . . [But] it is not about God’s service to us. It is purely our offering of service and worship to God, offering our lives, offering our prayers, offering our praise, offering our confessions, offering our finances, offering our service to others in the church body.⁸⁴

Kimball opposes a “flat, two-dimensional” service with sermon and song to a “multidimensional” service with an abundance of expressions, both traditional and new (multimedia, art, storytelling, new liturgical forms, etc.).⁸⁵ His contrast is somewhat reductionistic, but the basic difference between the modern and postmodern person is that the former wants to order and systematize things, because he or she processes everything in a logical and linear manner. Therefore, a worship service directed at moderns is indebted to a linear way of thinking: praise, announcements, drama/video clip, sermon, prayer, concluding song, blessing. The whole service is centered around the sermon as a focal point. Kimball’s criticism of seeker services in American megachurches is impossible to miss when he describes postmodern people as “...want[ing] to see fluidity and freedom rather than a neatly flowing set program. They want to see the arts and a sense of mystery brought into the worship service, rather than focusing on professionalism and excellence. This will shape how a worship gathering is designed.”⁸⁶

According to Kimball, a service directed at postmodern people must “move from a more consumer-oriented, ‘sit and watch’ event to a more vintage, community oriented participatory gathering which points us toward experiencing God in a transcending way.”⁸⁷ An “organic”

service design, centered on a scriptural passage that is illuminated from multiple perspectives (through adoration, action, proclamation, film, etc.), is intended to bring this transcendent experience about. Kimball argues that, "God has communicated in a multisensory way and should be worshipped in multisensory ways. In the emerging church, we must revisit a holistic multisensory approach to worship, an approach that is biblical."⁸⁸ This also names the goal of the service: "The emerging church must be one hundred percent about worshipping God.... We must worship or we cheat God and those who come to our gatherings."⁸⁹ Worship of God is to be continued in everyday life through a life made holy by God, lived in commitment to others (cf. Rom 12:1).

In *Postmodern Pilgrims*,⁹⁰ the influential American theologian Leonard Sweet establishes relationships between postmodern everyday culture and the culture of church communities. In *The Gospel According to Starbucks*,⁹¹ he travels a similar path by analyzing culturally relevant aspects of the well-known coffeehouse chain, and reflects upon them with respect to the design of postmodern worship services. In both books, he uses the acronym EPIC, which stands for "E – experiential, P – participatory, I – image-driven and C – connected." Sweet begins by making observations about the consumer world under the rubric, "E – Experiential." Frequently, products are not purchased for their own sake (i.e., usefulness, quality, durability), but rather because they promise experiential value (e.g., improved image, belonging).⁹² There are many people today who are no longer interested in consuming "second-hand experiences," but rather want authentic experiences of their own. This is equally true in terms of faith. In order to respond to this need, the service design for people shaped by postmodernism must emphasize experiential reality. This may occur in communal readings of the Psalms, in meditations on passages, in spiritual exercises and rituals. Worship services are not primarily about finding out more about God; they are about having a life-changing encounter with God.

In *Postmodern Pilgrims*, under “P – Participatory,” Sweet uses the image of “karaoke culture:” Stop letting the stars sing (representative), and start singing the current hits live to playback music yourself (participatory). In terms of worship services, this requires an important change in roles. People are no longer simply attendees at church services, but rather participants. Someone who is participating in the worship service must be able to finish the sentences of faith, hold the microphone, and make something new. Further possibilities for active involvement are candle-lighting, new Eucharistic forms, the sharing of experiences at table groups, writing out prayers, practicing a liturgical dance, painting a picture, and much more.

We also encounter “I – image-driven.” The postmodern generation has, according to Sweet, grown accustomed to absorbing information primarily through pictures and images, which represent certain contents. Thus, for example, in instruction manuals for electronic equipment, there is less and less written language; all the essentials are communicated through images. This is why visual elements like computer presentations, paintings and sculptures play an important role in the worship services of Emerging Churches, as does the overall design of the space. Sweet demands a visual language in liturgy and proclamation that touches people’s hearts, along with powerfully expressive images of faith (icons of identity), which represent the big picture of Christian faith in visual form and point beyond themselves to God.

“C – connected:” According to Sweet, we live in a “culture of bad connections.”⁹³ On the one hand, the phrase points out that defining interpersonal social structures like families, neighborhoods, and groups of colleagues is no longer dependable because these institutions themselves are in a state of flux. Even in these locations many people experience themselves as isolated—from God, from themselves, from others, from creation. On the other hand, the phrase emphasizes that we are exposed on a daily basis to negative influences that damage spiritual growth and

moral integrity. Worship services therefore serve to build up a "culture of good connections," again in this double sense. On the interpersonal level, worship services should awaken the sense of a spiritual home that connects individuals: "This speaks to me. I feel understood and accepted here. I want to belong here." The phrase, "belonging comes before believing," will be true for many people in the postmodern generation. Sweet emphasizes that Christian community (*koinonia*) cannot be reduced to bonding between like-minded people, but must aim to build bridges among people who are different.⁹⁴ When it comes to spiritual content, the word "nurture" is especially important to Sweet. People are to be given something that strengthens and builds them up, that heals wounds and awakens hope for themselves and for others. They are not only to be connected among themselves, but also with God, who says in Christ, "No longer do I call you servants . . . but I have called you friends" (Jn 15:15).⁹⁵

Concluding Acknowledgements and Perspectives:

"Test everything; hold fast what is good" (1 Thess 5:21)

In light of the multiplicity of new books and articles on the topic, it is easy to overestimate the influence of the emerging church movement. Some critics even refer to the Emerging Church movement as the most overestimated movement in church history. Those who speak to people from emergent communities and inform themselves through books and electronic media about the movement's concerns will be critically challenged; but more than that, they will also be encouraged. Against the backdrop of widespread pessimism about current developments in church and society, the Emerging Conversation's optimism, excitement and "shamelessness" in thought and deed are refreshing and stimulating. Since the young movement is in the process of discovering and differentiating itself, it is hardly surprising that its criticism of existing realities is often harsh, while solutions are proposed with great confidence.⁹⁶ In most cases, the things that define newly formed, emergent churches cannot be directly transferred to traditional

congregations, whose founding is a century or more in the past. And much of the theological statements and lived practices will cause legitimate concerns among professional theologians. At the same time, we must keep theology's original role in view—to critically accompany the work of the church in the present, and to renew it constructively for the future.

For most of us who make our Christian home in established Protestant churches, we encounter much in the Emerging Church movement that ought to be heartily welcomed and (in a teachable spirit) developed further, taking the generous grace of God which precedes all human effort as a point of departure and emphasizing spiritual community and the lived “priesthood of all believers.” We ought similarly to welcome the understanding of the worship service as the location of true worship and adoration of God, as well as of interpersonal relationship. We ought to welcome the incorporation of the arts in light of a predominant Protestant “fixation on the Word.” And we ought to welcome the flexibility and openness to change displayed in invitational church structures.⁹⁷

Two other points deserve further exploration: First of all, the Emerging Conversation unmistakably reminds us how central it is that Christ sent the church into the world.⁹⁸ Emergent communities take this sending seriously, putting it into action creatively and experimentally, and willingly learning from mistakes. A key question is in order here: What is the “inner mindset” (Dan Kimball) in our traditional churches when it comes to winning people (out of deepest conviction) for discipleship to Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God? And secondly, Emerging communities consistently orient themselves toward a holistic life of sanctification. This is reminiscent of the historic holiness movement and the denominations that grew out of it.⁹⁹ The aim of increasing holiness in life (1 Pet. 3:15) is at the very center, modeled after Jesus as the true “image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:5). And the holiness of personal lives is

indissolubly bound up with the social holiness of life in both church and society as a whole.¹⁰⁰ Wesleyan Christians will hear echoes of the original concerns voiced by the founders of their movement and contemporary church: "To reform the nation, especially the church, and to spread scriptural holiness across the lands."¹⁰¹ But they will also think critically about John Wesley's optimism of grace, perhaps especially his overestimating the potential for Christian perfection in this life.¹⁰²

Nonetheless, we must remember that it is both legitimate and encouraging that people (inside and outside the church) are connecting concrete expectations for their lives with God and the earthly body of human believers. Anyone who seeks help in life and consolation in death from the God of the Bible ought not, in our churches and communities, to have come to the wrong address. Nonetheless, a heaven on earth is something we cannot and indeed must not proffer in our churches.¹⁰³

The claim that theology and proclamation must be applicable to lived reality is an indisputable part of both our biblical, evangelical legacy. Particularly young congregations in established denominations remind us of the truth that the Christian faith seeks to function in individual lives as a concretely freeing, gladdening message. Furthermore, it seeks to work its way into society, shaping and building up, being, in Doug Pagitt's words, a "useful faith."¹⁰⁴ But to prevent a functionalist misunderstanding when we talk about a useful faith, we must continually refer to the central eschatological focus: the kingdom of God, begun in biblical times, still growing today, and waiting for completion. And even an analysis of the Emerging Church movement that is open and willing to learn leaves urgent theological questions unanswered.

Two representative points merit consideration. First, the foundational significance of religious experience was mentioned above in connection with worship services. But what is the role of theology as methodical, disciplined thinking about faith (particularly exegesis and systematic theology)? Emergent churches will doubtless reach people

who are responsive to experiential, affective approaches. But will this always be enough for them, and what about more cognitively oriented people, who, in Karl-Josef Kuschel's words, have "an appetite for knowledge"¹⁰⁵—people who, in light of the religious pluralism of our times, are seeking objective truth?

And second, the term "leading as a body" is a central one for the Emerging Conversation where teaching and church leadership are concerned.¹⁰⁶ But what is to prevent this from becoming a kind of "consensus theology" that is defined by the lowest common denominator and is, therefore, of questionable truth value? The one-sided emphasis on "the way of Jesus" (Brian McLaren) leaves open the questions of soteriology and Christology, which are central for evangelical theology and ministry. As far as ecclesiology is concerned, the established church will find significant theological and practical difficulties with the young movement. Here it is important to distinguish between "fresh expressions" within existing churches and radically new emergent communities.¹⁰⁷ While the former attempt to stay "compatible" with the church of origin as they develop new forms of expression, Emerging Churches intentionally strike out in new directions. Seen as a whole, one has the impression that each community needs and ought to find its own style. But where are the overarching criteria for Christian existence, i.e., lasting measures that outlast constant change? Does the diversification in community forms brought about by the constant establishment of new expressions of church not lead to an unconscionable fragmentation of the body of Christ? How can historic Christianity remain accountable as a conversation partner and recognizable as a unity in societal discourse? These and other questions form the backdrop for growing criticism of the Emerging Church movement (particularly the network called "Emergent"). These critical questions are crucial from the perspective of the institutional church, and they may not be easily discounted.¹⁰⁸

When the Protestant theologian Jürgen Moltmann was writing around the turn of the millennium, he can hardly have had in mind a debate with the Emerging Church movement. But what he says helps point the direction which church work, regardless of tradition, will need to take on in the 21st century:

Both in the State Church and the Free Church, we will find an independent church, and the building of the church from below. In order to succeed at this, however, churches will have to know and formulate and plan what it is they actually want. Worship services and church events planned in ignorance of what people want are a thing of the past. Each church must commit to lead as many people as possible to a living faith in Jesus Christ, must pray for this and do everything with this goal in mind. Self-sufficiency and self-satisfaction are no longer part of the church. Each congregation collects and shapes human communities in home groups and action groups. The church of Christ, made up of many different communities, advertises not itself but the Kingdom of God and his justice, and already experiences in its expectancy “the powers of the coming age” (Heb 5:6), the energies of the Spirit.”¹⁰⁹

Moltmann reminds us that being the church is ultimately about being a part of the Kingdom of God, which Jesus Christ announced with eschatological authority. In the Great Commission he assigns the disciples of all times and nations to join God’s eternal mission, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. It is this missional God who has a church in the world, commissioned to bear witness to his transforming love throughout the whole creation. This given mission should shape¹¹⁰ the church’s spirituality and identity, its practice and outreach—whether it is a traditional or emerging community of faith. Expectantly seeking to keep track of God’s dynamic and multiform missional work is and will be decisive for faithfully and fruitfully being church in a rapidly changing culture.¹¹¹

¹ Cf. Jürgen Habermas, *Glauben und Wissen*. [Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels, 2001] (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2002); Friedrich Schweitzer, “Evangelische Bildungsverantwortung in postsäkularer Zeit“ in Holger Eschmann and Achim Härtner, eds., *Glaube bildet. Bildung als Thema von Theologie und Kirche* (Göttingen: Ruprecht, 2010), 34ff.

² Cf. www.emergentvillage.com and www.emergent-deutschland.de. In English usage, “emergent” refers to an organized association of emergent communities, while “emerging” refers to the full breadth of the movement.

³ Cf. <http://www.nph.com/nphweb/html/pmol/emerging.htm>.for Henry Knight III’s instructive essay, “John Wesley and the Emerging Church.”

⁴ Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Sydney: Hendrickson, 2007), 131ff.

⁵ Latin: *emergere* – emerge, appear, issue.

⁶ Cf. Niklas Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme. Grundriss einer allgemeinen Theorie* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp), 1984.

⁷ “A social system forms when a network of autopoietic communication defines itself against its environment by restricting the suitable means of communication. Thus, social systems consist neither of people nor of actions, but rather of communications.“ Niklas Luhmann, *Ökologische Kommunikation: Kann die moderne Gesellschaft sich auf ökologische Gefährdungen einstellen?* 5th edn. (Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften 2008), 269. 1st. Edn., 1986.

⁸ Bruce Larson and Ralph Osborne, *The Emerging Church* (London: Word Books 1970).

⁹ In Great Britain one speaks of “fresh expressions of church,” and varied offerings within a congregation that are not in competition are termed “mixed economy of church.”

¹⁰ Cf. Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008).

¹¹ Fabian Vogt, *Das 1x1 der Emerging Church* (Glashütten: C&P 2006), 1.2. [Vogt’s pagination is by chapter and page, since each chapter begins renumbering. So, the references are to chapter.page: chapter1, page 2.]

¹² Cf. Jean-François Lyotard, *Das postmoderne Wissen. Ein Bericht*, 3rd. Edn. (Wien: Passagen Verlag), 1994; Wolfgang Welsch, *Unsere postmoderne Moderne*. 7th edn. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2008), 1-43.

¹³ Cf. Fabian Vogt, *Das 1x1 der Emerging Church*, 2.1f.

¹⁴ According to Jean-François Lyotard, modernism is characterized by the “rule of metanarratives, ... each providing a guiding principle that gathers all the efforts at knowing and the life practices of a given time, and directs them toward a common goal.“ Welsch, *Unsere postmoderne Moderne*, 12. Postmodern, by contrast, stands for the end of metanarratives.

- ¹⁵ Brian D. McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 11. Also, McLaren's blog at <http://www.brianmclaren.net/>.
- ¹⁶ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things To Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century* (Hendrickson: Peabody, MA, 2003), 15.
- ¹⁷ Cf. Leonard Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the Twenty-first Century World* (Nashville: Broadman, 2000); and *Aqua Church 2.0. Piloting Today's Church in Today's Fluid Culture* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2008).
- ¹⁸ Cf. Achim Härtner, "Megatrends that Challenge an Evangelizing Church" in W. Stephen Gunter and Elaine Robinson, eds., *Considering the Great Commission. Evangelism and Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 71-93.
- ¹⁹ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, p. 28.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.
- ²¹ Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity For New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2003), 14.
- ²² This programmatic definition stems from Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger in *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic 2005), 44-45.
- ²³ Cf. Leonard Sweet, *Nudge: Awakening to the God Who's Already There* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook 2010).
- ²⁴ Cf. Klaus Farin, Conny Agel and Anna Busch: *Freaks für Jesus. Die etwas anderen Christen*, (Berlin: Archiv der Jugendkulturen), 2005. Also see <http://jesusfreaks.com/content/about-jesus-freaks-eng>, accessed February 17th 2011.
- ²⁵ Cf. John R. Wilson: *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World: From Macintyre's After Virtue to a New Monasticism*. (Eugene/OR: Wipf&Stock, 2010); and John Michael Talbot: *The Universal Monk: The Way of the New Monastics*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011).
- ²⁶ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, p. ix.
- ²⁷ George W. Hunter III: *Radical outreach: The Recovery of Apostolic Ministry and Mission*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003).
- ²⁸ Erwin R. McManus, *An Unstoppable Force: Daring to Become the Church God Had in Mind* (Loveland: Group Publishing, 2001).
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.
- ³⁰ Cf. Achim Härtner, "Which Shape Should Evangelism and Mission Take in Our Multicultural and Pluralistic World?" in *Quarterly Review* (Fall 2002), 411-417.
- ³¹ Dan Kimball, *Emerging Worship. Creating Worship Gatherings for a New Generation*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 60-61.

- ³² William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).
- ³³ Cf. Paul Braoudakis, ed., *Das Willow-Creek-Handbuch* (Asslar: C&P, 1998).
- ³⁴ Doug Pagitt, *Church Re-imagined. The Spiritual Formation of People in Communities of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 42ff; and www.dougpagitt.com.
- ³⁵ Erwin R. McManus, *An Unstoppable Force*, 112ff. and 132ff.
- ³⁶ Cf. <http://erwinmcmanus.com/bio>.
- ³⁷ Erwin R. McManus, *An Unstoppable Force*, 29-30.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.
- ³⁹ Cf. John Riches, “Heiligung“ in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 1985), 14:718-737.
- ⁴⁰ Cf. Thomas G. Bandy, *Moving Off the Map. A Field Guide to Changing the Congregation*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 96ff.
- ⁴¹ Cf. Elaine Heath, “The Emerging Holiness Movement” in *Quarterly Review* (Summer 2005): 117-125, (<http://www.quarterlyreview.org/pdfs/VOL25NO2SUMMER2005.pdf>); and her monograph *The Mystic Way of Evangelism*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).
- ⁴² Doug Pagitt, *Church Re-Imagined*, 19-21. Also see: <http://www.solomonsporch.com/>.
- ⁴³ Brian McLaren, *The Secret Message of Jesus: Uncovering the Truth That Could Change Everything* (Nashville: Nelson/Word Publishing, 2007).
- ⁴⁴ Brian McLaren, *Everything Must Change: When the World's Biggest Problems and Jesus' Good News Collide* (Nashville: Nelson/Word Publishing, 2009).
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 5ff.
- ⁴⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (New York: HarperCollins), 1967.
- ⁴⁷ Cf. Fabian Vogt, *Das 1x1 der Emerging Church* (Glashütten: C&P, 2006), ch.4, p.6.
- ⁴⁸ Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), 141-142.
- ⁴⁹ Karen Ward, “The Emerging Church and Communal Theology”, in Robert Webber et al., eds. *Listening To the Beliefs of Emerging Churches—Five Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2007), 175.
- ⁵⁰ Cf. Doug Pagitt, *Re-Imagining Spiritual Formation: A Week in the Life of an Experimental Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 26f.
- ⁵¹ Rom. 12 and 1 Cor. 12.
- ⁵² Erwin R. McManus, *An Unstoppable Force*, 6-7.
- ⁵³ Fabian Vogt, *Das 1x1 der Emerging Church*, ch. 2, p. 3.

⁵⁴ Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, loc. cit., 91.

⁵⁵ Fabian Vogt, *Das Ixi der Emerging Church*, ch. 3, p. 5.

⁵⁶ Ibid., ch. 3, p. 4. MOSAIC in Los Angeles serves as an illustration: "We are a community of followers of Jesus Christ, committed to live by faith, to be known by love, and to be a voice of hope. The name of our community comes from the diversity of our members and from the symbolism of a broken and fragmented humanity which can become a work of beauty under the artful hands of God. We welcome people from all walks of life, regardless of where they are in their spiritual journey. Come to Mosaic, and discover how all the pieces can fit together!" Cf. www.mosaic.org.

⁵⁷ Darell Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1998), 79-80.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Dan Kimball: *The Emerging Church*, loc. cit., 91.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 94.

⁶¹ Cf. Doug Pagitt, *Church Re-imagined*, 45.

⁶² Cf. Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006). Hirsch identifies ten different traditions that he sees as supporting his understanding of Emerging Church, esp. 269-70.

⁶³ The expression "generous orthodoxy" was coined by Hans Frei in "Response to 'Narrative Theology': An Evangelical Appraisal." Cf. *Trinity Journal* 8 (Spring 1987): 21-24.

⁶⁴ McLaren takes his own instruction to heart in the title: *A Generous Orthodoxy – Why I Am a Missional, Evangelical, Post/Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Green, Incarnational, Depressed-Yet-Hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished CHRISTIAN* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).

⁶⁵ Ibid., 293.

⁶⁶ See the glossary in Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 277.

⁶⁷ Graham Cray, Ian Mobsby and Aaron Kennedy, *Ancient Faith, Future Mission: New Monasticism as Fresh Expressions of Church* (Norfolk/U.K.: Canterbury Press, 2010); and Elaine Heath, Scott T. Kisker and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove: *Longing For Spring: An New Vision for Wesleyan Community* (Eugene, OR: Wipf&Stock, 2010).

⁶⁸ Cf. David Schäfer, ed., *Die jungen Wilden. Storys über Jugendkirchen, Emerging Churches und Gemeindegriinder* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 2006), 49-97; also, Hans Hobelsberger et al., eds., *Experiment Jugendkirche. Event und Spiritualität*. (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 2003).

⁶⁹ Pete Greig and Dave Roberts, *Red Moon Rising. How 24-7-Prayer is Awakening a Generation*. (Lake Mary, FL: Relevant Media, 2003). Cf. www.24-7prayer.us/

⁷⁰ Cf. *Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (Ed.): Leidenschaft für Christus – Leidenschaft für die Menschen. Ordensleben am Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts* (Bonn: DBK, 2006).

⁷¹ <http://www.oekumenisches-forum-hafencity.de>.

⁷² See <http://urbanpoets.org/>. Here too there are corresponding small groups, called “poetry teams.”

⁷³ See the example of the Zürich community “X-Stream” with their worship service, called “Sunday-Plaza.” A Podcast by Sandra Bils illustrates the approach: <http://emergent-deutschland.de/2008/10/14/ hoeren-23-gottesdienst-als-marktplatz-sandra-bils/>.

⁷⁴ Cf. Mark Liederbach and Alvin L. Reid: *The Convergent Church: Missional Worshippers in an Emerging Culture*, (Grand Rapids: Kregels Publications, 2009), 243.

⁷⁵ Greek: *heteros topos* = other space. Cf. Michel Foucault, “Andere Räume“ in: Martin Wentz (Ed.), *Stadt-Räume* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 65-72.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Cf. Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, chapter 13.

⁷⁸ Inken Mädler: *Räume im Raum. Einsichten in private Heterotopien*, in: *Pastoraltheologie* (2006), 10: 403.

⁷⁹ Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 26. [Page reference is to German edition.]

⁸⁰ Cf. www.vintagefaith.com.

⁸¹ Brian McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again. The Return of the Ancient Practices* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008); Dan Kimball, *Emerging Church*, 95ff.

⁸² William Easum and Thomas G. Bandy, *Growing Spiritual Redwoods* (Nashville: Abingdon 1997). Cf. page 73, for a table comparing “Traditional,” “Praise” and “Sensory.”

⁸³ Cf. Dan Kimball, *Emerging Church*, chapter 11.

⁸⁴ Dan Kimball, *Emerging Worship*, 2-3.

⁸⁵ Dan Kimball, *Emerging Church*, chapter 11. [Specific page references that follow are from the German edition.]

⁸⁶ Ibid., 121.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 123.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 129.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 147.

⁹⁰ Leonard Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims*.

⁹¹ Leonard Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks. Living with a Grande Passion*, (Colorado Springs, CO), 2007.

⁹² Cf. Gerhard Schulze, *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft. Kultursoziologie der Gegenwart*. (Frankfurt/M.: Campus 1992/2005), pp. 33-54.

⁹³ Leonard Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks*, 144.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 153. The distinction between "groups that are bonding" and "groups that are bridging" originates with Ross Gittell and Avis Vidal, and was popularized through the sociological work of Robert Putnam.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 149.

⁹⁶ It almost sounds like self-immunization against criticism when Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger say, "This is a fragile movement that can be marginalized by denominational leaders and killed with criticism by theological power brokers." Cf. *Emerging Churches*, 29.

⁹⁷ Cf. Achim Härtner and Holger Eschmann, "Aspekte und Perspektiven des Gemeindeaufbaus aus freikirchlicher Perspektive" in Holger Eschmann, Jürgen Moltmann und Ulrike Schuler. *Freikirche – Landeskirche. Historische Alternative – Gemeinsame Zukunft?*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn 2008), 81-97.

⁹⁸ One of the best explanations on this issue is provided by Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church. What It Is, Why It Matters, How To Become One* (Grand Rapids: Baker 2009).

⁹⁹ Cf. *Quarterly Review* (Summer 2005) on "Holiness." Cf. <http://www.quarterlyreview.org/pdfs/VOL25NO2SUMMER2005.pdf>.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Lothar Elsner and Ulrich Jahreiß, eds., *Das Soziale Bekenntnis der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche. Geschichte – aktuelle Bedeutung – Impulse für die Gemeinde*. (Göttingen: Ruprecht, 2008), 17ff. and 62ff.

¹⁰¹ John Wesley, "Minutes of Several Conversations" Q.3, in *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 8: 299.

¹⁰² Regarding Christian perfection see John Wesley's sermons, Nr. 40 ("Christian Perfection") and Nr. 76 ("On Perfection"). In general see Michel Weyer, *Heiligungsbewegung und Methodismus im deutschen Sprachraum*. (Stuttgart: Christliches Verlagshaus, 1991), and Elaine Heath, "The Emerging Holiness Movement" in *Quarterly Review* (Summer, 2005): 1ff.

¹⁰³ Cf. Reiner Knieling, *Plädoyer für unvollkommene Gemeinden. Heilsame Impulse* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2008), 6f., 35ff., and 69ff.

¹⁰⁴ Doug Pagitt, *Church Re-Imagined*, 55.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Karl-Josef Kuschel, *Lust an der Erkenntnis. Die Theologie des 20. Jahrhunderts. Ein Lesebuch* (München: Piper 1994).

¹⁰⁶ Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 293; note 65.

¹⁰⁷ The movement's homeland, Great Britain, serves to illustrate both varieties.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Kevin De Young and Ted Kluck, *Why We're Not Emergent (By Two Guys Who Should Be)* (Chicago: Moody Publishers 2008); and Kevin De Young and Ted Kluck, *Why We Love the Church: In Praise of Institutions and Organized Religion* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009).

¹⁰⁹ Quoted from the joint European issue of the German-language church magazines of the Protestant Methodist Church, "unterwegs", "kirche+welt" and "methodist" (Vol. 1/1999): 7.

¹¹⁰ Cf. The Archbishop's Council, *Mission Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*, (London: Church House Publishing, 2nd Ed. 2009). John Hull: *Mission Shaped Church: A Theological Response*, (London: SCM Press, 2006).

¹¹¹ Cf. Achim Härtner, "Gottes Wirken auf der Spur bleiben. Perspektiven für Mission und Evangelisation im deutschsprachigen Methodismus," in *Theologie für die Praxis* (2010), 36:92-114.

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Lessons from a World Parish: Global Perspectives on Mission and Evangelism

Paul W. Chilcote

Making Disciples in a World Parish is a new resource that takes a global perspective on mission and evangelism. Here are some salient lessons from the three-year study that led to that volume.

In the midst of controversy concerning the movement of Christian renewal that he spearheaded, John Wesley confided to a friend:

I look upon all the world as my parish; thus far I mean that, in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty to declare unto all that are willing to hear the glad tidings of salvation. This is the work which I know God has called me to, and sure I am that his blessing attends it.¹

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The world of John and Charles Wesley was actually quite narrowly circumscribed. It is hard to imagine that they ever would have conceived this “world parish” as something extending around the globe. We find their spiritual progeny today, however, on every continent—their influence extends, literally, around the world. The Wesleys rediscovered the importance of accountable discipleship and the biblical call to share the good news of God’s love in Christ through a robust ministry of mission and evangelism. Making disciples of Jesus Christ constitutes the essence of their legacy, not only for those in the Methodist community, but as a gift to the wider church as well.

John and Charles Wesley’s rediscovery of a mission-church paradigm in eighteenth century England fueled the renewal of the church in their own age and offers a model of enduring significance for global Christianity today. They reclaimed mission as the church’s reason-for-being and evangelism as the heart of that mission in the world. Further, they developed a holistic vision of making disciples of Jesus Christ that maintained the integral connection of mission and evangelism, faith and works, personal salvation and social justice, physical and spiritual needs. Whether described as “The Wesleyan Way,” or faith formation in the Wesleyan spirit, or accountable discipleship, no one questions the fact that this “work” constituted the vital center of their mission. Within the context of this larger movement of the Holy Spirit, the Wesleys structured Methodism to help people discover the faith, learn what it meant to be a follower of Jesus, practice their newfound faith, and resituate their lives in disciple-making communities—this was “the Wesleyan way.” Contemporary Christian scholars and practitioners are rediscovering this same lesson—namely, that the primary mission of the church is to “make disciples of Jesus Christ.” But how does this way interface with the changing landscape of the 21st century? Does the Wesleyan way constitute an ancient-future paradigm of continuing value?

The Changing Face of Christianity

During the closing decades of the past millennium, the face of Christianity changed dramatically and the shifting terrain of the Christian world is reshaping Methodism worldwide.

Among the various seismic events of our time—such as the collapse of Christendom, the rise of postmodernism, and the explosion of Pentecostalism—none is more dramatic, perhaps, than the shift of the center of the Christian faith from the global north to the global south. Philip Jenkins popularized this historical fact in his bestselling *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*.² The mounting statistical evidence, however, is nothing short of overwhelming. From the early predictions of the *World Christian Encyclopedia* and the later *World Christian Trends*, to the hard data of the *World Religion Database (WRD)*, the *World Christian Database (WCD)*, and the *Atlas of Global Christianity (AGC)*, all indicators mark the southward and eastward movement of the Christian religion.³ Most projections predict that in another quarter century, nearly half of all Christians in the world will be in Africa and Latin America. Less than one third will be in the global north. If Christians today are serious about embracing God's mission in the world, then they must learn important lessons from all quarters of the global community of faith.

Navigating Mission in the 21st Century

Two immediate concerns provided the impetus for a new global project entitled *Making Disciples in a World Parish*. This three-year study related to mission and evangelism, involving nearly thirty scholars and practitioners from every continent of the globe, sheds light on these important questions and issues. First, this volume provides an opportunity to listen to voices from the world parish of the Methodist family, women and men who reflect on questions related to the practice of disciple-making in their own contexts. Five questions frame the study:

1. What are the most critical challenges related to disciple-making in your context?
2. What images/stories from scripture are most pertinent to your context in this regard?
3. How do you envisage and practice evangelism/disciple-making, therefore, in your context?
4. Where do you see signs of new life and vitality in the life of the church as a result of this vision and practice?
5. What do the lessons you are learning about disciple-making in your context contribute to the rest of the world parish?

The second concern, quite simply, is to contribute to a rediscovery of the biblical call to mission, a passion to spread the good news of Jesus Christ, and a celebration of what God is already doing to restore the world through a truly global, multi-cultural community of faith.

Images related to the bodies of water that separate people from people around the globe and those related to watercourses that make connections possible provide an interpretive framework for contributions from each region and knit together those from around the globe. For those in the Christian community, of course, water is a powerful baptismal symbol, representing both death and life, challenge and victory. African Christians who are experiencing exponential growth in their communities seem to be “riding the flood tide.” The context of Asia and Oceania is exceptionally diverse, both in terms of culture and religion, which necessitates “navigating cross-currents” with care and sensitivity. With the demise of Christendom in the West, European Christians find themselves “persevering through ebb tide,” whereas, in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Spirit is moving and blowing where the Spirit will, with the church “tacking into the wind.” Challenged by the eclipse of modernity and the birth of a nascent postmodern world, North Americans are “exploring an uncharted ocean.” Those privileged to cross

boundaries, living and working in cultures and speaking languages different from their own, are learning what it means to “value the confluence of streams.” The world parish is diverse and complex; the good news of the love of God in Jesus Christ is translatable and can find a home in any heart and any community.

Learning from the Wesleyan Tradition

Several salient Wesleyan themes continue to shape the missional/evangelistic practices of these global communities. First, the primary motif with regard to mission in the Wesleyan tradition was the idea of becoming God’s partners in the redemption of the whole world. The term “partnership” dominates much of the mission rhetoric across the church. It often functions with a dual meaning, signaling both the necessity of partnership across differing contexts and God’s gift of partnership in a mission that belongs ultimately to God – the so-called *missio Dei*. Second, the Wesleyan genius was to hold mission and evangelism together without pitting personal salvation against social justice. This potent conjunction characterizes disciple-making around the world today, and particularly in regions where injustice pervades. Theologically, this penchant to hold the personal and social, salvation and justice together is rooted in the Methodist refusal to separate faith and works. Finally, the holistic paradigm for evangelism that emerged from the larger vision of mission in the Wesleyan revival can be described as an interdependent network of missional practices, including faithful preaching, inspirational singing, accountable discipleship, authentic worship, and incarnational service. Global Methodists today seem to have the same ability to resist reductionist approaches to gospel-bearing and embrace “holistic evangelism” despite differences in culture.

Lessons from a World Parish

Making Disciples in a World Parish affords a number of critical conclusions – lessons that can inform mission and evangelism across the

globe. Just by way of whetting the reader's interest, several will be drawn from critical challenges related to disciple-making and several from biblical images that shape practices of mission and evangelism. This brief article concludes with lessons offered as a gift to others around the world in the words of the global partners themselves.

Critical Challenges

Mission among the poor in Africa immediately reveals the necessity of a holistic vision of disciple-making that refuses to separate the spiritual and the physical realities of life. Poverty breeds bitterness, violence, and ethnic animosity. So faithfulness to the way of Jesus mandates a vision of mission intimately connected with the Christian calling to be ambassadors of reconciliation in the world. In a post-colonial situation in Africa today, the primary question is, "What does it mean to be fully African and fully Christian?" This challenge calls for cultural sensitivity, openness to the other, and attentiveness to the multifarious ways in which the gospel may be proclaimed and lived.

Similar to the African experience, that in Latin America revolves around forms of colonial Christianity in which converts to the faith were forced to reject their indigenous cultures and practices. It seems as though the church has had to learn the lesson of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) over and over again. Rather than embracing the universal reach of God's love for all, the inertia of human self-centeredness seems to draw the community in the direction of shaping all others in its own image. This leads to a dominant centripetal force within the community of faith and a failure to embrace mission as the church's reason-for-being. Also, as in Africa, poverty plagues the life of the Latin American world, as systems of injustice exploit and dehumanize the children of God.

Almost all of the Asian contributors to the study identified the multi-cultural, multi-religious dynamic of their contexts as the most critical challenge. How does one do evangelism as a minority group within a sea of other religions and often in the face of repressive

government controls? While some of the Asian contexts, Korea, for example, demonstrate a remarkable expansion of the Christian faith —“from a trail of tears to a highway for the gospel”—most struggle to find a “space” in which “to be.” How does pluralism define the evangelistic task?

Western Europe presents a completely different contextual situation. Here, two concerns surface quickly: a post-Christendom, Western culture that is increasingly secular and emergence from the legacy of Soviet oppression. The former concern resonates with a North American cultural scene, in which Christians struggle with the same demise of Western religious hegemony and where massive cultural shifts have led so many to proclaim the irrelevance of Christianity.

The concern of those from the “Eastern Bloc” strikes a chord, perhaps, with those in Asia who find themselves in oppressive circumstances or emerging from them without any clear sense yet as to how they “hold together” these disparate aspects of their history. The thread that runs through both scenarios has to do with the experience of being “alien” to the environment or context.

Scriptural Images/Stories

References to various biblical images and stories in the study range widely across the canon of both Testaments, literally, from Genesis to Revelation. It would be dangerous to make any generalizations from region to region based upon these allusions and specific identifications. There was as much variation within the regions as among them. Three narratives, however, call for particular attention.

- **The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15).** Perhaps no text of the New Testament addresses the issue of gospel and culture more directly than Luke’s account of the Jerusalem Council. Given the fact that so many around the world have experienced the imposition of cultural forms and practices that, truth be told, are incidental to the gospel, this event in the early life of the church bears

perennial witness to the translatability of the gospel and the need for the gospel to penetrate the lives of all who seek to follow Jesus.

- **The Walk to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35).** Discussion of the walk to Emmaus event revolved around several important aspects of the disciple-making process. The primary image of journey or pilgrimage dominates the narrative. Like the “walk” to Emmaus, disciple-making is a journey that is shared with others in community. Jesus comes alongside those who walk in his way. He explains the scriptures—translates it into their lives in ways that connect and make sense—and helps the disciples rediscover the central place of the Word. The journey itself concludes in a sacramental act that propels the followers of Jesus into the world—back to Jerusalem—to share all that they have heard and seen.
- **The Samaritan Woman at the Well (John 4:1-42).** At least five of the participants in this study find a significant paradigm for mission and evangelism in this story. Providence figures prominently in this narrative. The Gospel-writer makes it clear that Jesus “had” to make his journey through this particular place. Prevenient grace, the Wesleyan might say, prepared the way for all that followed, in the same way that God’s grace precedes all else in mission, evangelism, and the process of forming disciples. In his encounter with this woman, Jesus crosses boundaries. He engages a *woman* who is a *Samaritan* at the “wrong” time and the “wrong” place. He extends the offer of relationship across the chasm created by culture and religion. But first, rather than engaging this woman from a position of power or strength, he approaches her in his need and weakness, permitting her to be the provider, the giver. He listens before he speaks, receives before he gives, and then offers life. The encounter proves to be

transformative for the woman who then hurries home to share the good news that she has heard and seen in the Christ.

The participants offer their insights with regard to these narratives as gifts for the benefit of Christian communities everywhere which seek to be faithful to the Gospel-bearing vocation given to them by Christ. Some of the lessons drawn from their insights, however, are best communicated in their own words – pithy statements that capture the essence of their vision and practice:

- ▣ Living the gospel means affirming diversity.
- ▣ Those who seek to follow Jesus must know that authentic discipleship is costly.
- ▣ Disciple-making involves participation in the *missio Dei*.
- ▣ Mission/evangelism begins with listening.
- ▣ The evangelist invites others to rediscover a biblical vision of life.
- ▣ Christians must learn how to connect the gospel to the culture.
- ▣ Disciples of Jesus cannot be made apart from the intimacy of small groups.

In the words of one contributor: “A rediscovery of a whole gospel that engages the heart, the mind, and the will may just lead to a new way of talking about being a disciple of Jesus and a community of disciples in this world.”

*This article is adapted from a recently published book, **Making Disciples in a World Parish: Global Perspectives on Mission and Evangelism**, by Paul W. Chilcote.*

¹ W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heizenrater, eds., *The Works of John Wesley*, Volume 19, *Journal and Diaries, II (1738-1743)* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 67.

² Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University USA, 2003).

³ Two prominent missiologists, David Barrett and Todd Johnson, are primary forces behind the creation of these massive databases and religious demographic studies. See Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopedia* (1982); the expanded second edition of this work, Barrett, Kurian, and Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia* (2001); Barrett and Johnson, *World Christian Trends*; Johnson and Ross, *Atlas of Global Christianity*; and the two online resources Johnson and Grim, *World Religion Database* and *World Christian Database*.

Making Saving Faith Clear: The Uniting Task of Evangelical Theology

Robert Coleman

We may differ on the finer points of our theological positions. But let us seek to proclaim the saving faith on which we do agree.

Evangelical theology rests on the Scriptural premise that our salvation is received by faith alone, in Christ alone, by grace alone.¹ Though Reformed² and Arminian³ scholars have different ways of explaining the origin of saving faith, both recognize that it is a divine gift and must be personally exercised to experience the new birth. Regardless of what happened before the foundation of the world, coming to faith in Jesus Christ is what matters now, because every true believer can be sure of eternal salvation.

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Calling persons to believe in Christ through evangelism, thus, becomes crucial. “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”⁴ Thankfully, whatever one’s theology, “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”⁵ Be it justification, regeneration, sanctification, or any other benefit of Christ’s saving work, faith appropriates the blessing of grace.

But what is meant by “faith”? Or to look at the question from a practical point of view: How is faith manifested? I believe the answer to that question becomes the all-important, everyday, down-to-earth demonstration of evangelical theology.

Common Faith

In a general sense, everyday life requires faith in someone or something beyond ourselves as trustworthy. Such faith makes possible the human experience.

The daily sustenance of our physical body is an example. We eat what is set before us at a café without even checking to see if it is safe. The food could be contaminated, or even poisonous; yet that possibility never enters our minds because of an implicit trust in those who prepare the meal. Perhaps a more extraordinary faith is found when driving a car on a busy highway. Because only a few feet prevent a head-on collision with the car on the other side of the road, one must have an incredible amount of faith in the driving ability of the strangers who speed by. Yet without that trust, we could never drive a car. And in a thousand other ways everyday, we act on the necessity of believing in what we cannot see.

Of course, our trust could be misplaced. The food, though appearing delectable, might cause sickness; and the supposedly safe driver on the other side of the road could veer off course and cause an accident. But there are safeguards to help prevent such instances. Government agencies test the purity of food serviced in restaurants and there are vigorous tests for persons licensed to drive a car. Safeguards are

needed to give assurance to faith. They serve to point out mistaken trust, while also justifying what is believable.

Valid faith can be proved, but not invented. In matters great and small, intelligent belief has as its object that which is worthy of trust. Far from being a blind leap into the unknown, valid faith is a commitment to reasonable certainty. Such trust involves our whole being. Nothing can be held back once the decision is made. There may be a place for hesitancy—even doubt—in coming to faith; but when one truly believes, everything is laid on the line. And what we believe, we act upon. Faith, by its nature, has to be a complete commitment.

There is a story of a high-wire artist who announced that he would walk across Niagara Falls on a cable stretched across the chasm while pushing a wheelbarrow. “Do you believe I can do it?” he asked the crowd gathered to watch. One hand went up. “Alright,” he said to the professing believer, “you get in the wheelbarrow!”

Faith is getting in the wheelbarrow—committing to the object of our trust, and letting our weight down on it. Unfortunately, the practice of our faith often lags behind its proclamation. It is not what we say, but rather what we do, that indicates what we truly believe.

Common faith and the spiritual reality of faith are not so very different. Whether realized or not, the necessary steps for experiencing eternal life in Christ have already been learned in the sort of faith we practice every day. The spirit of grace simply appropriates the components of common faith to their intended end in salvation.

Aspects of Saving Faith

The process of coming to saving faith begins in the unsettling awareness of our human perversity, and is intensified by disillusionment with our efforts to bring personal fulfillment and happiness. Feeling a growing loneliness and insecurity in the world, under conviction by the Holy Spirit, we come to realize our utter lost-ness. Our sin finds us out. We know that unless help comes from outside ourselves, there is no hope of salvation.

Realism, awakened by grace, looks “to the things that are unseen”⁶ and calls for faith in a supernatural Savior—the One who created the universe by the Word of his power.⁴ “Whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”⁵ Out of necessity comes the reality of “being sure of what we hope for.”⁶

The reasonableness of saving faith rests upon the trustworthiness of divine revelation. The Spirit-inspired Scriptures were given for this purpose, to supply a credible authority for truth, “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.”⁷ To the written Word of God can be added the supporting testimony of the church across two thousand years. The personal experience of the redeemed today confirms this witness and demonstrates its certainty.

The object of saving faith is Jesus Christ. Paul summed it up to the Philippian jailer: “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household.”⁸ This was the simplicity of the gospel proclaimed in the New Testament church: that by Christ “everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.”⁹ Believing on Christ means a firm reliance upon his word.¹⁰ It rests upon the conviction, full of joyful trust, that Jesus is the Messiah, the Author of eternal salvation in the kingdom of God; it affirms the historic events of his life, death, and resurrection. Believing on Christ means recognizing that Jesus has done it all; we contribute nothing toward salvation, and even our faith is a gift of God.

One thing must be clear in our minds, however: Saving faith is not anchored in the mere credibility of Christ’s work, but in him who did it; not faith in the blessings Christ gives but in him who is our life; not faith in our prayer for salvation, but in him who answers. And, it must be said, saving faith is not faith in faith, but faith in Jesus Christ who is all and in all. Martin Luther expressed it well: “Faith is a living, daring

confidence in God's grace, so sure and so certain that a man would stake his life upon it a thousand times."¹¹

*This faith personally embraces its object.*¹² Jesus does not ask us to believe in a creed, but to believe a person. "Come to me," he says, "and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me."¹³ Jesus offers us himself, as he said, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink."¹⁴ Belief in Christ always has to become personal to save. More than the recognition that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, it is the overwhelming realization that he "loved me and gave himself for me."¹⁵ Faith in the blood of Christ offered to God on my behalf means that it is acceptable as my own. Similarly, the eternal life Christ gives is made my own by that same trust in his finished work.

John Wesley described it well as he listened to a layman read from Martin Luther's "Preface to the Book of Romans." He wrote, "While he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for my salvation; and an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."¹⁶ Others will express their coming to faith differently, of course, but that sense of personalizing what Christ accomplished is the liberating reality for all.

True faith, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, finds continuing expression in obedience to Christ. "Come follow me" is the invitation.¹⁷ Following Christ is the present evidence of faith, just as it is the witness of our love. "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them," Jesus says, "he it is that loves me."¹⁸ In this pledge of love is the surrender of all that we know of ourselves to all that we know of Christ.¹⁹

Though scarcely comprehended in the beginning, it is a call to die. "If anyone would come after me," Jesus said, "let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."²⁰ The implications of what

this means will continue to unfold throughout our life, both in this world and in the world to come.

The Spirit of God keeps leading into new dimensions of faith. Incomplete knowledge, of course, does not mean the believer is any less sincere. A child can fully trust Christ for salvation and yet have a very limited understanding of doctrine. Thankfully, God is not finished with any of us.

There are degrees of faith. Paul exhorted the Roman church to welcome the “weak in faith.”²¹ He characterized the saints at Corinth as “infants in Christ,” not able to digest solid spiritual food.²² On a more mature level, the zealous Christians at Thessalonica were “an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia” and were still “growing abundantly,”²³ though Paul prayed that God would supply what was “lacking in their faith.”²⁴ Even the disciples struggled with what Jesus called their “little faith.”²⁵ Certainly they had much more to learn about the sacrificial lifestyle of Christ. Their comprehension of the atonement was clouded by their upbringing and incomplete understanding of Scripture. Yet Jesus patiently endured their human failings because, in spite of their shortcomings (and with the exception of the traitor), they were willing to follow him.

Persons who will practice all the truth that God gives will never stop growing in faith. And, knowing how little we have yet experienced in the infinite reaches of God’s love and power, we should pray like the disciples, “Lord, increase our faith.”²⁶

A Lifestyle of Faith

God calls us to live always by faith. He wants our life, a life that he can transform and work through to show his glory—just as he did with Abraham, when Abraham obeyed the call to “go out” with God and “by faith he went to live in the land of promise.”²⁷ Faith takes God’s Word as the promise of its fulfillment. I cannot forget the sermon of an old preacher who illustrated faith by imagining that when Abraham was told

by God that his barren wife would have a child, Abraham went out immediately and bought a baby buggy.²⁸

Surely we have a lot more to learn about that kind of faith. But one thing is certain: living what we believe will be manifest in our actions. We may not all live by what we profess but, for good or ill, we will all live by what we believe. It is faith all the way, for “from faith to faith, as it is written, the just shall live by faith.”²⁹ From the unswerving trust in Christ comes the strength to live a godly life and to bring forth works of righteousness. Yet there is no notion that these works of faith earn merit. If valid, they are motivated by the love of Christ implanted in the heart by the Holy Spirit and simply express our gratitude to God for his unspeakable gift.

Here we can all join in our common task to “make disciples.”³⁰ We may differ on the finer points of our theological positions, and in the next world, with more light, we will work out those differences. But for the moment, let us seek to proclaim “offensively...the substance of saving faith,”³¹ calling whosoever will to come to Jesus. We cannot determine who will respond to the invitation, but we can be sure that all who truly believe in Christ will be eternally saved.³² (1John 5:11-13; John 1:12; 2 Timothy 1:12).

¹ Romans 3:21; Ephesians 2:8-9. Note: Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture references and quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

² In classical Reformed Teaching, it is held that only after a person is awakened by God’s creative power can she/he receive saving faith, a grace determined by their election in Christ from the beginning of time. Accordingly, a form of regenerations precedes realized justification, though in point of fact it may be concomitant. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer, who now appears before God with the merit of the Savior. Those not previously elected in Christ and predestined to salvation will not have saving faith.

³ Contrasted to Reformed thought, Arminians contend that it is faith that is imputed, thereby making evident election, and this faith appropriates the righteousness of Christ. Such faith has no personal merit; rather it is the free gift of prevenient grace to all. Since it is entirely initiated by God, the difference with Reformed theology at this point is not human inability to believe, but rather the ability for every person by grace to have saving faith.

⁴ Romans 10:17.

⁵ Romans 10:13. c.f. Acts 2:21.

⁶ 2 Corinthians 4:16 (ESV). Note: Scripture quotations and references are taken from the English Standard Version except where otherwise noted.

⁴ Hebrews 11:3.

⁵ Hebrews 11:6.

⁶ Hebrews 11:1 (NIV).

⁷ John 20:31. c.f. John 5:24, 17:20; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 John 5:13.

⁸ Acts 16:31.

⁹ Acts 13:38. c.f. Romans 4:3; John 1:12, 11:26.

¹⁰ John 2:22, 3:36, et al.

¹¹ Martin Luther, "Preface to the Epistle to the Romans," in *Works of Martin Luther*, Vol. 6 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1936), 449-452.

¹² John 11:27, 20:31.

¹³ Matthew 11:28-29.

¹⁴ John 7:37.

¹⁵ Galatians 2:20.

¹⁶ John Wesley, *The Journal of John Wesley*, Vol. 1, ed. Nehemiah Cuonock (London: Epworth, 1909), 476. Note: This experience came in a Moravian Chapel at Aldersgate in London on May 24, 1738.

¹⁷ Mark 10:21, Luke 18:22. c.f. John 1:43; Mark 1:17, 2:14; Matthew 4:19, 9:19.

¹⁸ John 14:21. c.f. John 14:23-24, 15:10.

¹⁹ Since Christ is not divided, it seems logical that to receive him as Savior is also to receive him as Lord. I see no biblical reason to separate the two, as if we could have one part of Jesus without the other. For pros and cons of this issue, stated briefly, see: Wayne Groudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1994), 713-717. For a larger discussion, consult: John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1994) or Zane C. Hodgen, *The Gospel Under Siege* (Dallas: Redencion Viva, 1981).

²⁰ Luke 9:23. c.f. John 12:25.

²¹ Romans 14:1.

²² 1 Corinthians 1:1-2, 3:1-3.

²³ 2 Thessalonians 1:3, 7.

²⁴ 1 Thessalonians 3:10.

²⁵ Matthew 6:30, 17:20.

²⁶ Luke 27:5.

²⁷ Hebrews 11:8-9.

²⁸ A sermon of H.C. Morrison on Abraham, recounted by Dennis Kinslaw, “A Significant Moment,” *The High Calling* (Winter, 2008), 9.

²⁹ Romans 1:17. c.f. Habakkuk 2:4.

³⁰ Matthew 28:18-20.

³¹ I was intrigued by this characterization of Owen Strachan and Doug Sweeney when describing how Jonathan Edwards preached on justification and the new birth during the great revival in his church in 1734. Interesting, too, was the contrast of Edwards’ lectures on the same subject at Yale in 1723, here it is said that he “preached defensively.” The suggestion is that forthright exposition of saving faith produces more fruit in salvation. Owen Strachan and Douglas Sweeney, *Jonathan Edwards, Lover of God* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010), 80.

³² 1 John 5:11-13; John 1:12; 2 Timothy 1:12.

Joy in Evangelism

Communicating joy, and joyfully communicating, should be integral to evangelical witness in the twenty-first century. Both the methods of Jesus and those of the clown show just how joy may be conveyed in evangelism.

Jeffrey B. Snyder

As the story of Jesus is declared in Luke 2:10-11 to be “good news of *great joy* for all people,” Christian evangelists should provide a *joyful* witness to the world. Years ago I donned grease paint, a crazy quilt outfit, and made my debut as “Joyful Noise,” a Christian clown. Using a “joyful witness,” integral to the very definition of evangelism according to American Baptist Churches USA,¹ I was able to invite people to accept the messages of God’s love and Jesus’ redemption while we laughed together and shared the joy I feel in my faith.

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One challenge for evangelists today—as they face a postmodern world filled with jaded skeptics who either have not heard the good news or are highly suspicious of it—is to make good use the clown’s joy-filled methods of communication, without the grease paint and the costume, in order to break down barriers and invite people into the joy-filled good news we have to share. After all, the New Testament is filled with joyful messages of God’s redemptive love, and the Gospel of John states that joy is complete and fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, through whom we find the joy we all seek. The parables of the lost coin, lost sheep, and prodigal son all speak powerfully of the joy felt in heaven over the return of one lost soul. The Old Testament prophet Zephaniah speaks of God’s joy in humanity in 3:17, “...he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.” Further, Psalm 16:11 boldly declares, “You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” Communicating joy, and joyfully communicating, should be integral to evangelical witness in the twenty-first century.

The goal of this article will be to explore just how that joy may be conveyed in evangelism. To do so, it will continue down its clownish path, exploring the common ground that exists between the methods of Jesus Christ and those of the clown. George Victor observed in 1989 that Jesus Christ was at times willing to “play the fool” to further his mission.² Should we not be willing to do the same? Further, this article will also examine how fools have imparted serious messages in ways that could be heard over the centuries. Finally, appropriate applications of foolish, joyful methods for use in the aid of serious evangelical business will be presented. The Christian clown’s purpose is to express the joyful and joy-filled news of God’s joy, love, peace, grace, and forgiveness; and there is no reason for this to be any less the purpose of any evangelist.³ However, this would truly be a fool’s errand if a few basic terms were not first defined.

Defining Our Terms

Before continuing, what exactly is meant by the terms “joy,” “evangelism,” and “Christian clown?” Joy in the Old Testament had a very public dimension, referring to visible acts of rejoicing. Practical reasons for Old Testament joy included having a loving spouse or wise children, as seen in Ecclesiastes 9:9 and Proverbs 10:1. Theologically, Old Testament joy was a celebration of who God is and what God had done for God’s people, including deliverance, steadfast love, and salvation, as seen in Isaiah 25:9, Psalm 30:5, and Jeremiah 31:12-13. Furthermore, God’s very self also rejoices, as illustrated in Psalm 104:31.⁴

Moving to the New Testament, its books are suffused with joy. This joy emanates from the inauguration of the new age in which the Messiah has come. The angel’s pronouncement of good news of great joy for all people in Luke 2:10-11 becomes central to Jesus’ ministry in both word and deed. Joy is in the very character of God’s kingdom and once discovered, as stated in Matthew 13:44, the person who finds it will joyfully sell all he or she has to retain this treasure. Paul puts a fine point on the matter when he states that the ultimate source of joy is in Christ and the Holy Spirit (Phil 3:1; 4:4; Rom 14:17).⁵ Therefore, if we know the ultimate source of joy, we should share that source with others; and visible acts of rejoicing while doing so would not be out of place, according to the Old Testament. Of course, sharing Jesus with others is evangelism.

Evangelism, as a term, refers to the proclamation of the good news for all people, especially to those people who do not have a saving relationship with God. Evangelism is speaking the good news of the kingdom and of Jesus Christ the King to those who do not know it, while using an approach consistent with Scripture.⁶ American Baptist Churches USA states clearly that this should be a joyous witness provided by sharing personal stories with others about how Jesus has changed us and what Christ offers everyone.⁷ No tracts, no formulas, no hard sells are

required--only well told, engaging stories that invite others to come with us, much as the clown invites others to come play with her or him during a performance. Unfortunately, many Christians attempt the equivalent of an Old Testament approach to evangelism, which was the loud announcement of the death of enemy leaders or of battles won, an angry and militant approach that does not sound like good news to outsiders who hear it proclaimed.⁸ Perhaps the approach of a Christian clown would be more suitable.

The Christian clown stands on the shoulders of foolish giants. Clown, as a term, comes from Elizabethan England, originally meant “clod” or “country bumpkin,” and for our purposes was and is a person of childlike innocence and simplicity. Luke 18:17 informs us that only those who receive the kingdom of God with a childlike faith will enter into that kingdom, which thereby affirms the clownish approach. The clown is the essence of human comedy, laying out in word and deeds all the foibles to which humans are prone and doing so in such a way as to make the witness laugh while acknowledging that what the clown asserts and portrays is true. The clown embodies and delivers truth without sting. As the scholar Samuel Miller observes, “The clown recovers for us the nature of our humanity. In him [or her], in his ludicrous contradictions of dignity and embarrassment, of pomp and rage, of assurance and collapse, of sentiment and sadness, of innocence and guile, we learn to see ourselves. We follow in his bold bluff, and crumple in his public disasters. We are, in short, restored to our humanity.”⁹ Miller also believes the reason some people often do not tolerate clowns is the same reason that many people do not tolerate Christ. Both clowns and Christ point to who we truly are. Like Christ, the clown also points out that no matter how difficult life becomes, there is always reason to hope. The Christian clown, using the same tools, also points to the source of that hope: namely, Jesus Christ. As can be seen and will now be explored further, Christ and clowns share some common approaches and attributes.

Christ and Clowning: Common Ground

Some twentieth century scholars have, with admiration, called Jesus Christ the greatest fool of all and have equated him with a clown. This may appear blasphemous at first glance; however, these scholars assert that like the clown, and especially the medieval court jester, Jesus refused to be restrained by the traditions or customs of his day. Like that court jester, Jesus also spoke out against those truly foolish customs, traditions, and behaviors to which we are prone. In an age when his people were under military occupation and seeking a conquering king as their Messiah, Jesus taught that one must follow a path of peace, turning the other cheek rather than striking back. In a materialistic age, Jesus told his followers they must stop worrying about personal possessions. While others of his day treated women as possessions and objects, Jesus raised women up as equals. In an era that sneered at the poor and the outcast, Jesus sided with these denigrated peoples and asserted that they are the true salt of the earth and light of the world, quite foolishly according to common wisdom. Dan Feaster added to this litany, “Like clowns before and after him, [Jesus] was banished from his hometown and crucified.”¹⁰

Through his example, Jesus calls us to be contrarians to common wisdom as well, to act and speak foolishly by society’s estimation. A tremendous start would be to stop treating evangelism as a dour, hectoring, threatening job filled with formulas, tracts, and aggressive salesmanship. Further, we may set aside the knee-jerk reflex to defend Jesus’ reputation, ending up in endless debates that serve no one well, and instead proclaim the love of Christ and the joy to be found in Christ. After all, from what Jesus did and said, his reputation was the last thing on his mind. Jesus also employed a sharp wit to redeem people. Any clown will use humor and laughter to disarm opponents, as laughter provides a prime ingredient to strategies of hope, which Jesus well knew.¹¹ Of course, Jesus went further than being a contrarian. Jesus also scorned

abusive authority. In medieval England, court jesters would follow Jesus' cue.

As Jesus celebrated life and provided a message of redemption, love, hope, and joy, he also scorned abusive authority at every turn. Wandering troubadours would follow Jesus' example, traveling far with no places to lay their heads. Minstrels as well would follow Christ's example of frequenting parties in celebration of life. Of course, when Jesus came to a party, he scorned the social conformists by bringing a motley crew with him. When entering Jerusalem, Jesus parodied martial conquest, leading his band of socially unacceptable characters into town under a banner of peace rather than war.¹² Jesus also pointed out the pretensions and the misuse of power to which the religious leaders of Israel were prone.

Christ and clowns share yet another point of common ground. For Christian clowns, who model their clownish ways after Christ, their face paint holds serious meaning. Theologically, the white face paint represents death, but the vibrant colors sparkling in that white face symbolize new life that comes through Jesus Christ.¹³ This is one way in which a serious message is imparted through joyful means to create a welcoming, evangelistic invitation. There are other ways for the rest of us ordinary evangelists to impart this message, even though we do not apply face paint and don baggy outfits.

Serious Message Imparted Through Joyous Invitation

One method for imparting a serious message by different means is to speak in a different manner. No one wants to be lectured, bullied, or "preached at." Instead, there are a variety of approaches that allow us to be more humane and welcoming in our evangelism. These techniques provide greater possibilities of actually sharing the joy we receive as followers of Christ. Mazhar Mallouhi, a self-described "Muslim follower of Christ" living in the Muslim world, has succeeded in sharing the good news by developing true friendships with people who do not know Christ

—friendships that are agenda free. Mallouhi only shares Christ’s teachings with individuals who express a genuine interest. Mallouhi is also a contrarian in his approach. He absolutely refuses to engage in theological arguments and will not push one belief system over another. Instead, Mallouhi focuses steadfastly on the person of Jesus Christ and simply relates what Jesus means to him. In other words, Mallouhi takes the storytelling approach recommended by American Baptist Churches USA, an approach to delivering deep truths that Jesus himself used.¹⁴

When Jesus called his disciples, he called ordinary people rather than great orators and he let them be themselves. They made mistakes, they missed the point, they were entirely human; and Jesus would have them no other way. Today, Jesus asks the same of us. Jesus wants us to be who we are, dropping pretense and posture in favor of acting naturally, simply telling others why we love Jesus and trusting that Jesus will do most of the heavy lifting after we have done our small part.¹⁵ As a pastor recently told me when I asked how to convey the joy I feel in my love of Christ, “Just be yourself. In fact, I can tell you’re an amusing guy. I’m sure you’ll have no problem sharing your joy and excitement. I’ll bet you even make them laugh.”¹⁶ Jesus used humor, which is a clown’s best tool. It has been my experience that difficult subjects are often made easier to discuss with well-placed, well-timed humor.

Along with humor, there are a number of complementary strategies to employ when speaking with others about Jesus and the joy he brings. Jim Henderson’s six shifts from defending the faith to defending the sacred relational space we share with others are well worth employing when speaking with others on matters of faith. As Henderson states, there is a need to shift away from apologetics to apology for all the ways Christians have misrepresented Christ. Would-be evangelists also need to pause to listen, as listening is at least half of good evangelism. Christians need to own up to the fact that we are ordinary, imperfect people, just as the clown does in every act. That helps people to relax.

Like Mallouhi, Christians need to stick to talking about our spiritual relationship with Jesus rather than discussing, or fighting over, religion. Christians need to engage in dialogue instead of debate. Like Mallouhi again, Christians need to be authentic about our faith and avoid the temptation toward manipulation. Let interested individuals explore our faith with us as conversations naturally develop when true friendships are nurtured.¹⁷ However, speaking differently is not the only option. Christians must also act differently. They may act like Christian clowns.

Many societies see clowns as symbolic of hope, playfulness, creativity, and trust. Clowns at times play prophetic roles and challenge societal abuses with their carefully applied humor. Like the king's jester or fool in the medieval court, the clown may provide an outlet through which truth may be told.¹⁸ Therefore, like the clown, Christians should become symbols of hope, trust, creativity, and playfulness as well. The job is to be authentic about who we are, dropping pretenses of authority and infallibility, and using creativity to surprise others with unexpected kindnesses. Like humor, kindness offered unexpectedly opens many doors.¹⁹ Ironically, when we take on the clown's mantle, people will take us more seriously and will also be far happier to see us coming.

Application of Foolish, Joyful Methods to the Serious Business of Evangelism

Now it is time to move on and see how Christians may apply the clown's foolish, joyful methods to accomplish serious evangelistic business. First, Christians need to dress for the part, metaphorically speaking. The clown puts on costume and face paint, which allows her or him to assume a recognizable role. Doing so allows the individual to make an interior transformation as well, one that allows that individual to play the clown's role with abandon and joy. To effectively and believably express the joyful Good News to the world, we must be transformed by the Bible's message ourselves. To be transformed, Christians need first to understand that Jesus Christ is God's open invitation to joy for all of humanity. When Christians understand, and accept, the truth that God

promises us joy through Christ, we may stop a desperate search for happiness, scrambling here and there after one thing or another that culture offers up, and turn instead to Jesus for a deep and enduring joy.²⁰ Once an individual truly believes and accepts the joy that Christ offers us, we are properly “dressed” and may become purveyors of that joy. Christians who are transformed by the biblical message of joy are more inclined to deliver joy-filled messages to others and are more inclined to storytelling and the use of humor to make a point. Christian clown Donald DeNoon shares that clowning helped bring him to his own personal transformation and writes, “I am a new creation endeavoring to bring others into an awareness of new possibilities for their own lives.”²¹ Once Christians are properly dressed, we may also use the fool’s most powerful tool to deliver our message: humor.

Throughout all of human history, humor has been a valuable resource, allowing people to make serious points without engendering sour results. Jesus employed humor to good effect. For example, Jesus spoke of removing the log from your own eye before attempting to remove the speck from your neighbor’s eye in Matthew 7:3. Forms of humor that may be employed while telling the story of one’s personal faith include playfulness, exaggeration, paradoxes, anecdotes, parables, jokes, actual clowning, and pointing out incongruities in life. Humor may be spontaneous or stock humor, in specific situations. Through humor, people are invited to play, and they are invited to see their issues as both serious and less than serious in the same moment, which leads to amusement. As every clown knows, and as Jesus knew, amusement can be liberating.

Instructions for Using Humor Well

To use this tool well, potential evangelists need to:

- be open to humorous situations,
- tailor humor to the individual and situation,
- be conservative in humor’s use, as a little goes a long way,

- allow your child-like or clownish self to come forward and invite your hearers to play with you,
- be able to love yourself enough to laugh at yourself,
- laugh with others and never at them,
- never be sarcastic or judgmental,
- and apologize to those you offend.²²

Humor, properly used, allows the person using it to disclose something about him- or herself, and in doing so creates a relationship with the other person. Together, both are able to laugh over a difficult truth, the debunking of a myth, or the shattering of a favorite illusion and a relationship grows. Once the Christian is fully dressed, equipped with the clown's tools, and able to speak openly and honestly with others, the Christian evangelist always needs to communicate the joyful message the Bible has to present.

The joyful message Christians may impart includes the fact that God created us for joy. Michael Foss believes that God's joy is intended to be foundational to our lives, persisting in changing circumstances, and reframing our understanding of our current situation in the light of God's infinite love and grace, enabling us to trust in God and live in confidence no matter what circumstances life brings our way. Jesus is depicted throughout the Gospels bringing joy to those he met with the simple affirmation of each person's worth in the eyes of God. Foss argues that, because God created us for joy, to turn away from God is to turn away from God's joy as well as God's plan for our best possible lives. That is truly a message worth imparting to others, and conveying it as joyfully as possible. Further, Christians are called to love others as ourselves, and we cannot do so if we do not work toward what is best for others by returning them to God, the source of joy, which is the point of evangelism. In doing so, we fulfill the purpose to which we are called, to live beyond ourselves and reach out to others in love. This is joyful news, news well worth repeating.²³

A story from Norma Cook Everist illustrates effective, joyful communication of faith. While visiting a state school for those with mental retardation and physical disabilities, Everist observed a young resident named Jeannie as she interacted with her attendant. Jeannie was nonverbal but had learned much from the religion class in which she was participating. Everist states,

Jeannie came bounding into the room ... obviously delighted to be present for the religious education class. [Her attendant], obviously delighted to see Jeannie, greeted [her enthusiastically]. ... Jeannie, having heard the gospel as she was able to know it, had received the love and word of God with community and commitment. Jeannie was vibrant. No longer sitting in a chair with eyes turned downward, she was learning to communicate the faith with her eyes, her smile, and her relationships. Many times Christians who do have the ability to speak, live with eyes turned downwards. They may “know” much more than Jeannie ever will, but they have not learned how to communicate it.²⁴

Like Jeannie, all Christians should bring joy to evangelism. It is a valuable approach long used to deliver good news and make necessary, corrective points. Jesus, who is the source of joy for humanity, certainly delivered a joyous message. Christian clowns have kept up that approach, and it will serve us well today.

Conclusion

This article has explored the common ground shared by Jesus Christ and clowning, and how we might employ the strategies of both to gain better results for our evangelistic efforts. It has been shown that Christ refused to be shackled by convention, was a contrarian to the common wisdom of his day, and scorned abusive authority. All of these methods are employed by clowns. Christian clowns take things a step further, and reflect Jesus’ resurrection in their face paint. While

Christians who are not clowns by training will not don the grease paint and odd outfits, it is possible to employ the strategies that Jesus and clowns share in common. This is accomplished through speaking joyously and invitingly as a clown would, and acting the part by approaching others in an open manner and defending the relational space between people rather than the Christian faith. Further, Christians may employ foolish, joyful methods in the service of evangelism, including dressing for the part by transforming ourselves in preparation for evangelism, employing humor and storytelling in delivering the Good News, and always emphasizing the joy-filled message presented in the Bible. In so doing, we may help to undo some of the polarizing damage that strident, angry evangelists have done in the past with hard sell and formulaic approaches that did much to drive people away and give evangelism a very bad name. Using the joy-filled approaches of both Jesus and the clowns to delivering a message and conveying truths, we may be able to turn many to Christ.²⁵ Even though we do not wear the colorful grease paint, the joy we feel in Jesus and all Jesus has done for us should be apparent on our open and welcoming faces.

¹ “Evangelism.” <http://www.abc-usa.org/WhoWeAre/Identity/Mission/Evangelism/tabid/64/Default.aspx>

² George Victor. “Playing the Fool.” *The Journal of Pastoral Counseling* 24(1), Spring-Summer, 1989, 51.

³ Donald L. DeNoon. “Reluctantly Yours, ‘Bow the Clown.’” *The Journal of Pastoral Counseling* 24(1) 1989, 56.

⁴ Katharine Doob Sakenfeld. Ed. *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: I-Ma*. Volume 3. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008) 417.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 417-418.

⁶ F. Albert Tizon, personal communication, September 8, 2010.

⁷ “Evangelism.” <http://www.abc-usa.org/WhoWeAre/Identity/Mission/Evangelism/tabid/64/Default.aspx>

⁸ Katharine Doob Sakenfeld. Ed. *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: D-H*. Volume 2. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008), 358.

⁹ Dan Feaster. "The Importance of Humor and Clowning in Spirituality and Pastoral Counseling." *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 25(5) 1998, 382-383.

¹⁰ Ibid., 231.

¹¹ Jim Henderson. *Evangelism without Additives*. (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2005), 83-86; Feaster, 382.

¹² Feaster, 382.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Paul-Gordon Chandler. *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 52, 79.

¹⁵ Henderson, 97.

¹⁶ Alexander G. Houston, personal communication, October 13, 2010.

¹⁷ Jim Henderson & Matt Casper. *Jim & Casper Go to Church*. (Carol Stream, IL: Barna, 2007), 24, 48, 72, 103, 129, and 146.

¹⁸ Feaster, 385.

¹⁹ Henderson, 98-100.

²⁰ Michael Foss. *The Disciple's Joy: Six Practices for Spiritual Growth*. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Books, 2007), 9.

²¹ DeNoon, 56, 60.

²² Feaster, 386-7.

²³ Foss, 6, 11, 15, 16, and 21.

²⁴ Norma Cook Everist. *The Church as Learning Community: A Comprehensive Guide to Christian Education*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 125.

²⁵ Sakenfeld, Volume 2, 734.

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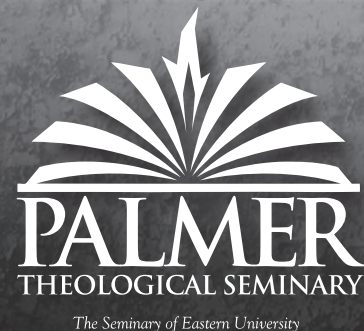


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Book Talk - With Soong-Chan Rah

An Interview by Montague Williams

Soong-Chan Rah, Associate Professor of Church Growth and Evangelism at North Park Theological Seminary, is well-known for his work in cross-cultural ministry, urban ministry, and evangelism. Here he discusses his latest book, *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church*, with *Witness* contributor Montague Williams.

The cultural changes in the United States call for new mores in evangelism, and Soong-Chan Rah attempts to answer that call in his recent book, *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church* (Moody, 2010). He builds upon the work in his previous book, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (IVP, 2009) and moves readers toward practical frameworks for multi-cultural ministry. In this interview, Rah offers insight concerning specific ideas he sets forth in the book and other implications of evangelism in a multi-cultural society.

Montague Williams is a PhD Student focusing on “Church and Society” and “Evangelism” at Boston University in Boston, Massachusetts (USA).

Your book appears to have a wide ecclesial audience. How important is that for this particular book?

Soong-Chan Rah(SR): Seminary professors and pastors may well be the first group to interact with the book. But I would hope that the book would have a broader appeal to lay leaders and congregants. I think academics and clergy may initially have more awareness about the changes in American Christianity, but local congregations are also becoming increasingly more aware of these realities. Hopefully, the book can be used to raise cultural intelligence for our future pastoral leadership as well as helping churches in their current context.

In your insistence that Christians move toward the shalom of God, you call for a soteriology that is not limited to individual souls but one that includes “the transformation of society” (34). How does this kind of soteriology inform multi-cultural evangelism and ministry?

SR: More and more Christians are beginning to understand the need to move away from an exclusively individualistic perspective on soteriology. This movement does not mean that we diminish individual salvation in any way. This is not a zero sum equation. We are not trying to diminish the role of individual salvation in order to increase the role of community transformation. Instead, we are beginning to recognize that the gospel is no less than the salvation of individual souls, but there is more than that. God’s work is not just for the individual but towards a shalom that extends behind the narrow parameters that we have outlined. Towards that end, we need to see both the value of culture as created and re-created in the image of God, as well as the impact of the Fall on culture. Our understanding of both the value of culture and the fallenness of our own culture yields a greater sensitivity towards other cultures.

Interestingly, you have included in your definition of culture: “...the presence of God, image of God, mission of God found in the human spirit, soul, and social system” (38). As an educator, do you find any resistance to this claim on biblical and/or theological grounds?

SR: These phrases are beginning to be used in a number of different contexts. We have to remember that these are not phrases or concepts that we are pulling out of thin air; they are concepts and applications that are found in the Scriptures. There has been a cultural captivity of the gospel message that has only allowed us to see the Scriptures, the gospel, and culture from one particular angle. As our churches begin to become more diverse, we are able to see culture from other angles. Students who have a broader experience across cultures tend to be able to appreciate these perspectives more readily. As I teach these concepts, I continue to stress that they arise from a biblical understanding of culture, rather than simply adapting the world’s definitions and trying to simplify our theology to reflect only a Western dichotomistic, almost Gnostic and even docetic perspective, i.e., a belief that seemingly rejects the presence of God in the human and in the world.

You have made it clear that the Homogenous Unit Principle (HUP) has been misappropriated in a way that supports racial separation for the sake of church growth. Do you see any place for HUP in a faithful practice of evangelism in the U.S. or anywhere?

SR: If we approach the HUP as one of the ways that we do evangelism rather than the only way that we grow churches, we may begin to move in a positive expression of this concept. A simple paradigm shift may go a long way. So while I find many problematic elements of the HUP, there are times that we can see elements of the HUP appropriated to share the gospel with many lives. For example, in a very basic way, if a community speaks French in an all-English speaking context, it makes sense to translate the gospel message to

speak into the French-speaking community in specific ways. The gospel will be appropriately heard through a particular language. This application of the HUP differs from the way it has been applied, such as “We only want upper-middle class whites in our comfortable suburban church.”

Do you think the cultural changes in the U.S. may require evangelical churches to rethink the ministerial vocation of the “evangelist?”

SR: That rethinking is probably long overdue. The cultural changes in both the United States and throughout the world should cause us to rethink the ways that we have approached evangelism in the modern era. Under the immense pressures of the Western modern project, we have allowed our methods of evangelism to be held captive by Western modernity. We are beginning to realize how the role of the “evangelist” was defined in very professional terms and limited to a particular application and expectation. It is essential that we rethink the application of some of these terms.

Along with pointing to the practice of sharing and listening to each other’s stories as necessary for multi-cultural ministry, you also nuance the notion of cultural intelligence by calling for cultural intuition. Are story-telling and cultural intuition limited to certain people with particular personalities and abilities or are these skills learnable?

SR: All cultures have the capacity to tell stories and to develop cultural intuition. These practices tend to be more latent in certain cultures, but it does not mean that these “skills” do not exist. For example, in certain cultures, communication tends to focus on the presentation of logical arguments more than the telling of stories. This does not mean that having a reasonable argument is inappropriate or wrong; it just means that we tend to practice those skills more than developing other forms of communication skills. Cultural intuition, like any other form of intuition, is developed through practice and even

discipline. The discipline and practice of cross-cultural interaction and relationships lead to a cultural intuition more than simply the acquisition of a particular skill set or set of knowledge. And some cultures may value that practice more than others. But that does not mean that the value or ability does not exist.

You assert that cultural captivity of Christianity happens when “pragmatism overrides biblical values” (74). Along with that you mention that there is “some extent” to which “the church in America . . . needs to adapt to the pragmatism . . . of American culture” (74). How do you see this happening well?

SR: It is a very delicate balance. I believe in grace for those that recognize that a balance needs to exist, even as they seek to work through an imbalance that may actually exist in their own lives, their communities, and their churches. I see the development of multi-cultural and multi-ethnic churches as an ongoing learning experience. We will need to continue thinking, working, and living through various iterations to find that balance. One of the themes in the book is that it is important to continue to learn and grow about cultural differences. It is a learning process. In the same way, churches can apply a level of pragmatism and practical knowledge to the church, but continue to seek the right balance – recognizing that this practice requires great wisdom, discernment, and re-evaluation.

Your book is insightful and offers helpful frameworks for thinking about and practicing multi-cultural ministry. What kind of studies or yet-to-be answered questions do you think follow your book?

SR: I would like to continue the conversation, particularly in evangelical Christianity, regarding the role and definition of culture for the Christian and for the evangelical church. This discussion about culture and its relationship to the church is an ongoing one and as the demographics of Christianity changes and the culture around us changes, we will need to continue to visit this issue. We will continue

to need a refining of the theology of multi-cultural and multi-ethnic churches. Most of us now understand the sociological need for these churches, but we need to go deeper regarding the biblical need for these churches. Many have begun the conversation, but we need further reflection and conversation.

Book Reviews

Who Stole My Church? What to Do When the Church You Love Tries to Enter the 21st Century

by Gordon MacDonald

Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007. 248 pages.

Reviewed by Michael J. Gehring

It is certainly not a well-kept secret. The mass media has reported on it from the 1986 *Newsweek* article, “From Mainline to Sideline,” to the more recent “The Decline and Fall of Christian America” (*Newsweek*, April 13, 2009). Even Stanley Hauerwas colorfully weighed in stating, “God is killing mainline Protestantism in America, and we goddam well deserve it.” (*Newsweek*, August 9, 1993). Mainline decline, and the diminishing influence of Christianity in the United States, has been widely reported, and yet pastors often field questions from congregants such as, “When Pastor So and So was here, our pews were filled. Why can’t it be like that again?” Frequently it is discovered that Pastor So and So’s tenure coincided with the mid-1950s, and the current pastor starts to

look upon earnest parishioners as castaways on a deserted cultural island locked in time.

In such moments of pastoral frustration, it would be more helpful to hand a parishioner a copy of Gordon MacDonald's book, *Who Stole My Church?*, than to respond by saying something to the effect of, "Your ancestors chose to locate this church on a postage stamp piece of real-estate in what is now a transitional neighborhood." The book is profitable in generating conversations about generational giving, congregational conflict, worship wars, and cultural change. It would be of benefit for the leadership team to read as well as for small group study.

MacDonald tells a fictionalized account of a pastor and a small group of members of a New England congregation entering into a long conversation about the dynamics creating dissent in their midst. Some mainline parishioners will feel MacDonald's fictional New England congregation is further along the continuum for what he sees as necessary transitions for the 21st century than their own congregation. Others may even feel that MacDonald is selling a certain kind of future that is not necessarily a foregone conclusion. Nevertheless, MacDonald's book is a valuable resource for facilitating significant congregational conversations in a non-threatening manner. And just as Frederick Buechner assumed that "the story of any one of us is in some measure the story of us all" (*The Sacred Journey*, 6), so too the story of any one congregation is in some respects the story of every congregation.

Michael J. Gehring is the Senior Pastor of First United Methodist Church, Lincolnton, North Carolina (USA).

Missional Map-Making: Skills for Leading in Times of Transition

By Alan J. Roxburgh

San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010. 224 pages

Reviewed by Christopher B. James

In contrast to proliferating titles touting strategies for helping your congregation become a missional church, Roxburgh offers a helpful critique and hopeful practices for ministry in the Western church's changing context. Calling on his own experiences as a pastor, and more recently as a church consultant, Roxburgh depicts a widespread sense of disorientation besetting church leaders in our time. A map serves as his key metaphor throughout the book for how one makes sense of the world (xi).

The primary map that interpreted the world and guided ministry for centuries came from modernity, and with its division of subjective self and objective world, it is no longer tenable—new maps must be made. Roxburgh attributes the failure of modernity's map to the effects of eight currents of change: globalization, pluralism, rapid technological change, postmodernism, staggering global need, loss of confidence in primary structures, the democratization of knowledge, and the return to Romanticism. In this transformed world, strategic planning is impotent to form missional community (79). Even the sociological and historical work of missional authors such as Alan Hirsch are judged to be blatant efforts to exercise the kind of control and management that is no longer possible (109).

While Roxburgh spends the greater part of his book developing his portrait of a world in flux and the plight of ministry in this context, his most promising contributions are found in the final chapters where he outlines an alternative approach to cultivating missional community. In step one, the leader begins to assess how the environment has changed in the local context. This investigation should privilege people's stories over

demographic data. Roxburgh calls step two “redeveloping a core identity,” by which he means cultivating environments in which people can begin to believe they are God’s people and thus have the capacity to hear God in the biblical narratives, and in their own lives (140). Here, eliciting people’s stories creates both a space of trust and a corporate sense that these stories may be crucial in discerning God’s future locally. Step three calls for the creation of a parallel culture through experiments in Christian practices. Roxburgh urges that this be done in small ways, not church-wide campaigns. This could take shape as a group that meets to discuss their experience with the daily offices of prayer, a monthly practice of hosting a stranger for dinner, intentional friendships with the poor, and serious learning engagement with the Biblical story. The fourth and final step is forming partnerships with the surrounding neighborhoods and communities. The initiative for these partnerships should arise from the ordinary people of God, for it is among them, Roxburgh believes, that that Spirit of God dwells (170). Thus, it is they who must ultimately be the missional map-makers.

Roxburgh offers a compelling vision for missional leadership that imagines the pastor primarily as a cultivator of communal discernment rather than visionary. As a detective of divinity, the pastor calls forth the missional vocation from the people of God rather than vision-casting for a missional church. While Roxburgh’s style is repetitive, his approach to the church’s evangelistic calling is refreshingly humble, contextual, communal, and connected to the practices from which zeal for witness inevitably arise. *Missional Map-Making* offers an accessible, hopeful, and practical contribution, especially to students and pastors grappling with the changing contours of Western society and their implications for ministry.

The Indispensable Guide to God's Word

By Donald J. Brash

Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2010, 144 pages.

Reviewed by Phillip Haberkern

In *The Indispensable Guide to God's Word*, Donald Brash successfully manages to walk a number of tightropes. He effectively straddles the lines between scholarly and popular, and pastoral and intellectual—which is very difficult to do. By focusing on an incarnational approach to the Scriptures, *The Indispensable Guide* also navigates between literalist and post-modern hermeneutical extremes. This makes the text widely teachable, as students from a variety of traditions will find insights within its arguments that both cohere with and challenge their theological presuppositions. I find that the promise of the book's meta-narrative is borne out at numerous points in its pages, as Brash creates a middle ground of interpretive theory that shepherds readers (to borrow one of his own dominant metaphors) towards greater scriptural understanding.

This book is at its best when it explores the meanings of terms that are essential to theological inquiry, but potentially confusing or intimidating to a wider audience. Whether analyzing the etymology of *perichoresis* as a means of understanding the Trinity (104), digging into the necessity of dialectic reasoning for understanding faith (30-31), or explicating the distinction between hermeneutics and exegesis (50-53), Brash's explanations both invite newcomers into theological dialogue and offer novel insights to other scholars. These passages reveal Brash's pastoral background in a subtle but significant manner, as they could easily serve as references for preachers and teachers, as well as their audiences. In a similar vein, the scholarly apparatus and structure of the book speak to the book's dual audiences in an effective manner. The footnotes are rare enough not to dominate the text, but offer substantial context for Brash's arguments. The suggested readings and questions at

the conclusion of each chapter also invite further investigation, without making that task seem onerous or impossible. In sum, the chapter structure and progression of topics within this book build systematically towards a coherent and persuasive image of the processes that have led to the formation and interpretation of God's Word.

It is either a remarkable coincidence or a testament to Brash's care in preparing this text that his most dynamic explanation of an incarnational approach to the Bible sits precisely at the mid-point of the book (64-65). Either way, the centrality of the Incarnation as the culmination of God's Word and the foundation for its continued meaning to God's people on earth becomes quite clear in Chapter Six, where Brash handles the tricky question of the Bible's truth in conveying the authentic teaching of God. It is here that the book walks the finest line between hermeneutic approaches to the canon, and also where it tackles the difficult implications of God's becoming human in the person of Jesus Christ. The parallels that Brash draws here between the transformation of the godhead into flesh and the translation of God's teaching into human language serve to honor the underlying truths contained in Scripture while illuminating the mechanisms (with their limitations and possibilities!) that God has used to articulate them. I found myself nodding while reading this passage; it was a place where I found my own approach to Scripture given voice in a sophisticated and coherent way for which I had previously lacked words. And although I have highlighted this particular moment as decisive in the theological arc of the book, this example could be multiplied, particularly in the ninth chapter on authority or the third chapter on language, where Brash explores how God's message is mediated, but not diluted, by our human faculties.

To conclude, I want to emphasize again that this book is very successful in speaking to a variety of audiences, whether in the academy, the classroom, or the pews. I feel that it represents the best of public scholarship and theology, in that it will provoke new ideas and

approaches among all of these audiences, as well as encourage conversation among them. I also believe that the book is an authentic expression of Brash's own engagement with God's Word as a scholar and pastor. The balancing act he achieves results not from an effort to please all, but rather from a sustained, intimate dialogue with God's Word that has found expression here in the idea of an incarnational understanding of Scripture. I suspect that only someone with decades of experience in the classroom and congregation could achieve this, and *The Indispensable Guide* is a testament to Brash's synthesis of those arenas and challenge to his colleagues and peers to think in this holistic manner about the object and exercise of our profession.

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Longing for Spring: A New Vision for Wesleyan Community

By Elaine A. Heath and Scott T. Kisker

Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2010, 104 pages

Reviewed by Andrew D. Kinsey

It was amidst the ruins of World War II that Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote about the need to practice “a new kind of monasticism” in the church. With the churches in Germany seriously compromised, Bonhoeffer realized how the church had lost the capacity to view “history from the underside” and the ability to speak in defense of the voiceless victims of terror. There was a need, he wrote, to find creative ways of practicing “life together” in community.

That need persists. In *Longing for Spring*, professors of evangelism Elaine Heath (Perkins School of Theology) and Scott Kisker (Wesley Theological Seminary) address the importance of the new monasticism in the church today. Writing within the Wesleyan tradition, Heath and

Kisker speak to how the church must not simply strive to ride the turbulent waters of change and strive for self-preservation but must also find meaningful ways to embody the good news to share with the world. The new monastic movement must develop imaginative ways of navigating these waters and explore new avenues of sharing a robust vision for Christian discipleship. Heath and Kisker want to engage the church in how the new monasticism may contribute to this ongoing conversation in the church and how the new monasticism may deepen life among what they call the “New Methodists.” Their work grows out of ongoing contact with this movement, along with a deep desire for renewal in the church.

Heath and Kisker divide their work into six chapters. They begin by sharing their own stories of faith (Chapter 1) and then move to offer two helpful chapters on Intentional Community and Renewal (Chapter 2) and Protestant Models of Intentional Community (Chapter 3). Persons familiar with the new monasticism will pick up on the Rule of Faith developed by Saint Benedict and the other forms of intentional community practiced throughout the church’s history – e.g., the Beguines, the Brethren of the Common Life, the Pietists, and the Methodists, to name a few. The next major section of the book deals with “What the New Methodists Want” and the need to develop a “Rule of Life” within the Wesleyan community (Chapters 4 & 5). Here, the focus is on the Wesleyan/Methodist tradition and the resources this tradition can provide for renewal in the church. With honesty and integrity, Heath and Kisker address what the “New Methodists” want and what they will mean to The United Methodist Church. Nothing less than developing a new monastic order is at stake, and the authors provide concrete examples of what this order may entail for the future (Chapter 6). Heath and Kisker include three helpful appendices and a bibliography that groups and churches can utilize.

Heath and Kisker's *Longing for Spring* raises several issues that persons involved in the teaching of evangelism will want to note. First, with a great deal of resources now available with respect to the missional and emergent church movements, professors and practitioners of evangelism will want to learn how the new monastic movement converges and diverges with these current streams of renewal in the church. Here, the notion of trend or fad comes to mind: Is the new monasticism something that will "stick" or will it come and go along with other forms of spiritual formation? Time will tell. Second, how may those within the Wesleyan/Methodist tradition converse with those who are part of the "New Methodists"? Heath and Kisker's work opens up several doors for further discussion. The question now is, "How may this discussion continue in the days ahead?" Their ideas about the role of "anchor congregations," their re-appropriation of the General Rules, their focus on the "marks of conversion," their stress on integrating the new monasticism into theological education all point to a promising venture. We can only hope that others will hear what they are saying.

It is at this juncture, however, that an observation arises with respect to Heath and Kisker's proposal: *Longing for Spring* reflects a deep yearning in the church for the retrieval of those treasures or practices that will assist in renewal. There is a sense in which they want the church to rummage in the attic to retrieve what has been lost. And yet, what is striking—at least with respect to the listings in the bibliography—is the advocacy of Phyllis Tickle's metaphor in *The Great Emergence* of the church having a "rummage sale" every five hundred years as new forms of church emerge (p. 82). Not to go down the road of total disregard of Tickle's argument with respect to her underlying Gnostic assumptions regarding history, but a concern does arise over how the church wants to situate itself along the ancient-future paradigm: What are the governing metaphors that can assist us today in the work of renewal? That is, might we not want to have a moment when we clean out the attic to discover

what we have lost rather than have a sale to sell off what we need? It would be a shame if the church put out signs saying “closed” or “half-priced” before seriously realizing what treasures are there to salvage and use.

Nevertheless, Heath and Kisker’s work needs to be read in local churches and seminaries. It is part of the ongoing journey toward renewal that the church longs to see.

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Holistic Mission: God’s Plan for God’s People

Edited by Brian Woolnough and Wonsuk Ma

Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010. 268 pages

Reviewed by Matt Elofson

In their book *Holistic Mission: God’s Plan for God’s People*, Brian Woolnough and Wonsuk Ma have assembled a diverse group of writers who articulate their understanding of holistic mission, share their experiences of various ways in which people have endeavored to carry out holistic missions in assorted global contexts, and consider some of the potential implications and challenges they perceive in employing a holistic mission strategy in contemporary settings. The editors have divided the text into three primary segments along the lines of the above-mentioned topics, and placed these between Woolnough’s brief introduction concerning holistic mission and his conclusion addressing some perceived implication for the church. The first segment represents the efforts of a number of authors (Sider, Sugden, Mombo, and So) to articulate a biblically and theologically informed understanding of the nature of holistic mission. The second section highlights various accounts (Tizon, Lubaale, Jayakumar, and Paredes) regarding the development of holistic mission activities in diverse contexts over the past century. In the

final major segment, the authors (Myers, Samuel, Raistrick, Miles, De Villiers, Ajulu, Maggay, Allaby, Herberty, and Hodson) address a number of issues regarding the implementation of holistic mission strategies in different contemporary cultural contexts.

One of the highlights that will captivate the reader throughout *Holistic Mission* is the diverse group of authors who have contributed their voice to this discussion. Woolnough and Ma have included the reflection of individuals informed by a wide array of ethnic and gender backgrounds, as well as ministerial and practical experiences. The inclusion of these unique perspectives effectively facilitates the expansion of any engaged reader's vision of holistic mission and how it might be practiced effectively.

While the various authors write from very different frames of reference, they all directly or indirectly affirm the importance of understanding the nature of the gospel as holistic. Some engage historical events or philosophical ideas that they assert have contributed to Christians' tendency to draw significant distinctions between the physical and spiritual realms. Others address the perceived tendencies of "conservative" churches to emphasize the death and resurrection of Christ in their theology and evangelism, or "liberal" churches inclination to focus primarily on the life of Jesus for informing their perceptions. According to So, this leads "conservative" Christians and churches to communicate primarily a "spiritual" gospel with limited concern for the physical needs of people. In contrast, he argues that "liberal" Christians and churches focus primarily on a "social" gospel aimed at meeting the physical needs of people while de-emphasizing the significance of their spiritual needs (57). The various chapters in the text produce a compelling biblical and holistic corrective to this detrimental dichotomy between our vertical relationship with Christ and our horizontal relationship with others and creation that has been so pervasive in much of Christian thinking and practice over the past century.

The essays included by Woolnough and Ma also superbly weave together the individual and collective responsibilities and opportunities that Christians have in ministering holistically in our world. Some authors highlight the efforts of individuals like V.S. Azariah, Diego Thomson, the Rev. Desmond Tutu, and others as examples of what can be accomplished when individuals employ an approach to mission that is holistic in one's local settings. Other contributors stress the necessity of our involvement in local Christian communities, Christian non-governmental organizations, and other community based cultural institutions if we are going to truly affect change for the poor and oppressed in our world. As a result, it becomes clear to the reader that any approach to holistic mission that will produce a substantial and sustainable change in the lives of the people to whom we minister requires not only our individual engagement, but also our involvement in the efforts of various communities, organizations, and institutions that influence the actual structures that hold sway over their lives. By accentuating the need for our involvement on both of these levels, the authors place the burden for real transformation on all of us as opposed to leaving it on one individual or one community.

While a couple of the essays might benefit from further development, this collection represents a much needed theological and practical treatise that challenges any view of the *missio Dei* that does not embrace the synergistic relationship existing between our verbal declarations of faith and authentic concern for those around us as demonstrated by our "passion to challenge those things that deny life in its fullness" (43). The nature of the arguments made in these pages should compel every serious reader to move beyond a flawed, dualistic perspective of mission to one that embraces God's holistic mission that is clearly evident in Christ's ministry in the gospels.

Matt Elofson is Assistant Professor of Practical Theology at Azusa Pacific University in Azusa, California (USA).

Mission Between the Times: Essays on the Kingdom

René Padilla

Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Langham Monographs, 2010

Reviewed by Al Tizon

I picked up a gem a few months ago while in Cape Town, South Africa for the Third Congress on World Evangelization (Lausanne III): a copy of the revised and updated edition of René Padilla's classic *Mission Between the Times*. The people at Langham Partnership International (a ministry of John Stott) thought it important enough to refresh this volume and make it available in time for the third Lausanne gathering in October 2010, if for nothing else, I surmise, to honor one of the premiere missiologists of our time.

Perhaps it has been long enough that the younger generation of mission scholars and missionaries does not know the impact that Padilla has had on the global evangelical missionary movement since Lausanne I. Without his influence, ministries of compassion and justice, as well as the absolute necessity for authentic contextualization in mission, would still be relegated to secondary status; worse, they might still be stigmatized as activities of the liberal Social Gospel or Marxist liberation. "Real" mission would still be primarily defined in terms of verbal proclamation, church planting, and numerical church growth. Don't get me wrong: Padilla never abandoned these evangelical commitments. But in the context of ministry among the poor in Argentina and many other parts of revolutionary Latin America, he understood that the gospel that called the church to do evangelism and discipleship also called it to work toward liberation and social justice. It was Padilla and a handful of other courageous evangelical theologians in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s that paved the way for holistic or integral mission.

"Evangelism and the World," the paper that Padilla presented at the first Lausanne gathering in 1974, has been lauded as one of three

presentations that laid the theological foundation for evangelicals to engage wholeheartedly in ministries of community development, justice for the poor, advocacy for the oppressed and the transformation of society, alongside ministries of evangelism, personal discipleship and church expansion. (The other two such presentations at Lausanne I were given by Samuel Escobar and Carl F.H. Henry).

The original publication of *Mission Between the Times* (Eerdmans, 1985) contained “Evangelism and the World” and eight other mission-shaping articles written by Padilla between 1974 and 1984. This revised and updated edition adds to this classic collection Padilla’s evaluation of the Lausanne Movement since 1974 in a chapter entitled, “From Lausanne I to Lausanne III.” On the merits of this new chapter alone, all who are interested in mission studies— from first year students to seasoned teachers—should get a hold of this book. There are several reasons for this.

First, its brief historical survey of the many conferences and consultations after Lausanne I locates in their proper contexts most of the nine original chapters, which were papers that Padilla presented at these various gatherings before they became the chapters of his book. To read “Christ and Antichrist in the Proclamation of the Gospel” (Chapter 6) in the context of the second Latin American Congress on Evangelization in Lima, Peru in 1979, “The Unity of the Church and the Homogeneous Unit Principle (Chapter 8) in the context of the Consultation on HUP in Pasadena, CA in 1977, “New Testament Perspectives on a Simple Lifestyle” (Chapter 9) in the context of the Consultation on Simple Lifestyle in Hoddesdon, England in 1980, and so on, squashes any attempt to read Padilla abstractly.

Second, the new chapter does not just provide an historical overview; it also offers an evaluation from the elder statesman, and he gives both affirmation and critique of the Lausanne Movement. Whereas the events and gatherings that led to Lausanne I, such as the formation of

the Latin American Theological Fraternity (FTL), resulted in a reawakened evangelical social conscience (a good thing), the events and gatherings that led to Lausanne II, such as the Consultation on World Evangelization in Pattaya, Thailand in 1980, took the evangelical church several steps backward by perpetuating the dichotomy between verbal proclamation and social responsibility.

And third, this additional chapter looks forward and hopes the best for the Lausanne Movement. Writing it just before Lausanne III, Padilla poses three challenges to the evangelical missionary community: 1) that it continues to move toward radical discipleship, 2) that it takes seriously the phenomenon of globalization, especially how it affects the poor, and 3) that it takes seriously the ecological crisis as a central concern of evangelical mission.

I realize that most of this review commented on one chapter of a book. Enough reviews were written for the original publication when it was released, I suppose. But let me say this about the rest of the book: far from going stale over the past twenty-five years, the original chapters read as relevantly today as they did when they first appeared; indeed, they have remained God's word for the missional church today. May the twenty-first century evangelical church have the ears to hear.

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The Mystic Way of Evangelism: A Contemplative Vision for Christian Outreach

By Elaine A. Heath

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008. 207pp.

Reviewed by Leicester Longden

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following book review appeared in Volume 24, but was incorrectly attributed to another reviewer. The corrected version is reprinted here. *Witness* apologizes for the error.

Too many publications in evangelism and mission either focus totally on academic analysis or on pragmatic programming. In contrast, Elaine Heath's new book is a refreshing surprise. *The Mystic Way of Evangelism* opens up new avenues of exploration in evangelism as a churchly practice and an academic discipline.

Building on William Abraham's groundbreaking definition of evangelism as initiation into the Kingdom of God, Heath explores new territory of her own by reframing the relational character of evangelism in terms of holiness as the "greatest apologetic for the gospel." She grounds this new trajectory in the "great exemplars of holiness—the Christian mystics," thus requiring the theorists and practitioners of evangelism to re-engage the Christian tradition in light of contemporary spiritual longings.

Heath makes an original and creative contribution to the discipline and practice of evangelism by engaging in a kind of *resourcement*, not as a mere intellectual project, but rather a missional vision for engaging the "postmodern hunger for mysticism" at a time when the Western church is entering a dark night of the soul.

One of the strengths of her work is that she identifies a real hunger in contemporary culture and addresses it by considering evangelism through the eyes of mystics. More importantly, she develops a praxis model of contemplative evangelism, and creates a narrative that

imagines the implementation of the model in local churches in ways that make it possible to reconceive the mission of every congregation.

In a format reminiscent of William Abraham's book, *The Logic of Renewal*, and using the classic contemplative stages of purgation, illumination, and union, Heath lays out a contemplative vision of evangelism in three parts. In Part One, she describes the "dark night of the soul descending on the church in the United States." In Part Two, she draws five key elements of a contemplative vision from the comparison of ten Christian mystics considered as pairs in five chapters. These include, among others, Hans von Balthasar and Julian of Norwich, Phoebe Palmer and Father Arseny, Thomas Kelly and Henri Nouwen. In Part Three, she tells a fictional story of a man named Sam and how he is evangelized by a church engaged in contemplative practices.

I will be using her book in my Missional Church class this spring because it combines theological research with reflection on local church practice. Heath's approach serves pastors and congregations well, grounding them in the larger ecclesial tradition and encouraging bold ventures in contemporary practice.

One weakness of her contemplative evangelism project is its lack of precision in identifying the location of the corporate dark night of the soul. Granted, her application of the "dark night" experience to the corporate malaise of the church is illuminating. It is, I believe, similar to the reflections of theologians like Rusty Reno and Ephraim Radner, but also more accessible to pastors and congregations. Still, it is never quite clear whether it applies to the mainline churches or to Bible belt evangelicals who shun the divorced. Further, her critique tends toward a generalized reference to sexism, racism, classism, as if the naming of these three ideologies is a sufficient account of the wounds of human sin. Specifically, in the case of her exposition of "eco-evangelism," she rightly names alternative forms of church which care for the earth, but she does not address in any way the danger that eco-evangelism itself may be co-

opted by a “green” ideology or become merely one more moralistic crusade by a church seeking relevance.

Heath realizes the need for more theological reflection on the dark night as a corporate reality. The appendix to her book acknowledges her critics, and rather than dismissing them invites them to continue reading the mystics as possible conversation partners.

Heath comments in *The Mystic Way* that “seminaries are not, as a rule, organized around prayer, nor are they focused on the pedagogy of the soul.” As an author, however, Heath has the kind of compassionate, practical wisdom and spiritual discernment that points pathways toward a more contemplative vision of theological education and evangelistic practice.

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