

*Christian Ministry in the
Emerging Culture*

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Introduction

Current Culture

The culture of society is like a stream of water. When it is at a place of levelness, it can become stable for a while in its speed and direction. Water, like culture, that is slow and predictable might bring feelings of control and stability. It's been my observation that people have been known to embrace the old before they try the new. But in a short amount of time society can experience a transitional shift, where many become uncertain what will happen next. This loss of stability is usually feared and sometimes warned against, yet it freely acts and reacts to the environment around it.

The culture of society was moving in an era of pre-modernity, when it encountered the Renaissance and Enlightenment of the modern era. This changed the direction of the current as the culture readjusted itself to be modern and to adapt to modernity. As it continued to flow in modernity it encountered another shift. What exactly this shift looked like is not important issue. The important thing is that it happened and that there was a change in the current. The culture began to flow in new directions. Where exactly this current is going is uncertain and how it looks is the found in the answer to the question: "what is post-modernity?" Yet this is not to say that post-modernity is now the current. The reason is that there still remains uncertain and lasting undercurrents from modernity, that are a part of the visible elements that can be found in our contemporary society that can not be labeled in unwavering terms that we can define. The point is that now the United States is experiencing a time of transition between shifting paradigms. Whatever the new world looks like it has, for the most part, reacted against the era of Enlightenment we call modernism.

The Church Has Problems

The law of life is “adapt or perish!” As the people change the institution must continually adapt or run the risk of becoming out of touch and therefore “irrelevant.” But as it is, there are many churches in the US that are not willing to adapt. There is something very wrong with churches in America. Some common lines are the church is not relevant to my life, I don’t need church, I don’t trust institutions, churches just want to control people, I don’t believe in church. When did people drop church? George Barna, a social scientist who has studied church and cultural trends for quite a while, states: “After nearly two decades of studying Christian churches in America, I’m convinced that the typical church as we know it today has a rapidly expiring self life.”¹

What ever happened to the church, it appears to be in a declining mode? For so long many churches have been in “bunker mode”² and have been hidden away. It seems that as the church now looks up, it finds itself staring at a world it has never know, quite similar to the story of Rip Van Winkle. “While the overall U.S. population is greying, the historic Protestant institutions are greying faster.”³ A big question that many people who are concerned about church ministry have is whether the old thinking and strategies need to be adapted or whether church ministry needs to reinvent itself.⁴ Within the last ten years numerous books have asked this very question. Some have suggested that a

¹ Barna, 1998: 1

² This term is used to describe the church that is protecting itself from the rest of the world. Like a soldier, held up in a bunker, the church has been on defense and just ended up waiting and watching the time pass.

³ Regele, 14

⁴ There are some that because of the general mistrust of institutions think that if those institutions that people didn’t trust were to cease all ministry that could really help the church break ties with the negative feelings people have towards church structures.

brand new look is what is needed,⁵ others have been willing to adapt what they already are and become a changing church that can take on new elements.⁶

The church is to be in the world but not of the world.⁷ If we exchange the words church for boat and world for water, we can see that the boat is to be in the water but of the water. If the boat takes on too much of the water, it will sink. But if the boat is not even in the water it will not move. Some may see the problem as the boat has too many holes in it. Others may imagine that the crew of the boat is too busy fighting amongst themselves to care about others not in the boat. Others may find fault with the fact that the crew has used the boat to protect them from the water, but has no desire to move. Whatever the case may be, make no mistake churches today are in trouble. Whether the solution is for the old and present churches and their structures to sink or whether they need to be fixed is hotly debated.⁸ It is unfortunate, as there are many who have stood outside the church who have seen enough that they want no part in church.

Four Areas of Conflict

I have attempted to break down the problems in the church into four areas. The first area is *the church's conformity to the world*.

For too often what they see in the church is not counter-cultural but conformism, not a new society which embodies their ideals but another version of the old society which they had renounced, not life but death. They would readily endorse what Jesus said of a church in the first century: 'you have the name of being alive, but you are dead.'" (Rev.3:1) – John Stott, well respected Conservative Bible Teacher⁹

⁵ That because of the negative image of church, if the church emerges with a new image then people will take notice. The problem is that this type of thinking often leads to a very negative attitude toward more traditional churches. They seem to think that pursuing the new paradigm keeps them relevant.

⁶ One of my case studies, Hosanna! has taken this stance on the issue, however they don't claim to be other than who they are. They are not trying new things for its own sake; they are purposeful in their change.

⁷ John 17:14 NIV

⁸ or should they fix the areas that need work or should they reinvent the wheel?

⁹ Stott: 1988, 16

Ironically the rebuke of worldliness comes from both sides of the evangelical/liberal Christian line. From the Conservative Right and the Liberal Left,¹⁰ each call the church to be different than the world and stop compartmentalizing their faith. On the one hand, the Right calls the church to stand for truth and the absolute authority of the word of God, to stop privatizing and being secretive about its faith. On the other hand, the Left calls the church to action by living their faith through service and action: to love people as Jesus loved, to fight injustice, and to provide for the poor.

The second area I identify is in *the church's hiddenness from the world*. Hibernation occurs usually in the winter months. The purpose of hibernation is to conserve energy and make it through the bitter winter. Times have turned bitter, in some sense, for Christianity from the influence of secularism and other anti-Christian movements on society. Instead of standing in the face of coming harsh weather, the Church has been hibernating. However, Jesus called his followers to be salt and light to the world, to affect people by the testimony of changed lives and "to make the invisible kingdom visible," as John Calvin¹¹ wrote. But what happens when the church becomes a protecting church and builds walls instead of bridges? It becomes completely and entirely separate from people. While the message they are proclaiming may be the gospel, the people are receiving not a message of a God who loves them, but one who has become hidden, and forsaken them in the face of increasing hard times.

The third area is in *the decline of the church's influence in the world*. After withdrawing from the cultural arena and sowing seeds of division and separation the church has reaped what it has sown. Today, it is the society that is setting the trends and

¹⁰ see Appendix F for a break down of Evangelical Left (post-Conservative)

¹¹ quoted in Edwards, 25

telling people how to live life. Some call this the end of the era of Christendom. Others have called this society post-Christian because the society has largely overcome the current of Christianity and now flows through the undercurrents of society as culture uses the language that the church used to draw on.¹² These may indeed be the days of post-Christianity where Christian rhetoric has become a commonplace for the society we live in. Tonight Show host Jay Leno has vividly illustrated this in his "man-on-the-street" interviews. One night he found some random young people and asked them questions about the Bible.¹³

"Can you name one of the Ten Commandments?" he asked two college-age women.

One replied, "Freedom of speech?"

Mr. Leno said to the other, "Complete this sentence: Let he who is without sin..."

Her response was "have a good time?"

Mr. Leno turned to a young man "Who, according to the Bible, was eaten by a whale?"

The confident answer was "Pinocchio."

Perhaps it isn't as post-Christian as we may have thought. Although two-thirds of all teenagers say they know all the basic teachings and principles of the Christian faith, two-thirds of them reject the existence of Satan, three-fifths reject the existence of the Holy Spirit, and half believe that Jesus sinned during His lifetime.¹⁴ In light of some of the recent emergence of ignorance, some have preferred to call this time pre-Christian¹⁵ rather than post-Christian. They do so because they believe that we live in a period of

¹² see Appendix C

¹³ Sommers, Christina Hoff, "Living in a Moral Stone Age" speech at the Shavano Institute for National Leadership, printed in IMPRIMIS, the monthly journal of Hillsdale College, October 1997

¹⁴ Barna, "The Year's Most Intriguing Findings," Barna Research Studies, December 12, 2000

¹⁵ Such as Leonard Sweet, Bill Easum and Tom Bandy (church consultants and leadership trainers)

time where there is a dramatic ignorance people have concerning the most basic Christian teachings of God, faith, sin, Jesus, and salvation.¹⁶

The fourth area *is the church's deficiency offering itself to the world*. The sad story is, for many people standing outside the church they are seeing locks on the doors to the churches and are being turned away from the very place that is supposed to be for them to encounter the presence of God. In some cases churches have deprived people of God, community, and forgiveness. One of the church's purposes is to offer people a Spiritual encounter with God but, while this generation has been called the generation that yearns and searches for spiritual reality, it appears it is not finding it in the church.¹⁷ Not only are they not finding spiritual reality but also they're not finding acceptance or an invitation to come in.

Those outside the church, when they take a close look at the church, hoping to find love and acceptance are not finding it. People say they are finding schisms and division, mistrust, competition, gossip, backstabbing, lies and deceit, scandals, hypocrisy, condemnation, self-righteous leaders, and judgmental people. In some cases the church is worse to them than the world. As a result the people outside the church have remained outside the church and the ones that have left have gone off seeking for themselves. There is a group who has left largely because they felt the Church encouraged them to do so. George Barna observed,

Apart from the disappointments many will experience when they are not permitted to tear their faith apart before trying to put it back together and own it as their own, millions of kids will graduate from high school and never be pursued again by a church until later on in their adult years.¹⁸

¹⁶ Sweet, ST 1999, 45, he argues very persuasively that the culture is largely ignorant of the Christian faith.

¹⁷ Hahn and Verhaagen, preface

¹⁸ Barna, 1992, 94

Perhaps their rationale is that because the young person doesn't fit the mold of the church and bend its knee to the particular church creed or doctrine, the church encourages leaving so as to not contaminate the rest of the church.

More than that, church splits and schisms are bringing about a shared experience of, what is commonly called being "burned by a church." I have heard numerous people tell me about a negative early childhood or teenage church experience that left them wounded even after they left home. When the term is used, the person could imply any of number of things. Among them, that:

1. Someone at church offended them.
2. They saw the church as full of hypocrites.
3. They view the church as too close-minded.
4. The pastor said something they didn't like.
5. They wanted a reason to leave.¹⁹

They usually leave the church carrying feelings of resentment and in some cases, betrayal. These experiences may add to the claim that they distrust institutions and contribute to their growing skepticism of Religion. Those that leave the church "burned" do not lose their faith entirely; they emerge from the church with a non-religious kind of faith that becomes extremely private to them.

Re-conceptualizing Church Fishing

If the culture is water, the church is a boat. The church needs to be able to navigate cultural transitions and times of rough waters. Whether the society is warm and friendly or raging and violent, the church must learn to adapt to the shifting tides of the current culture. Jesus' instruction for believers to be in the world but not of the world echoes the sentiments that Christians need to be different than the world they live in. As

¹⁹ Hopkins, David, "Burned in the Bible Belt: Too Much Theology or Not Enough?" *Antithesis*

it is, Christians are called not to be conformed, but to be transforming agents in the culture.²⁰ Historically there have been many examples of conflict between the Christian church and its culture. It goes as far back as the apostle Paul when he challenged the people of his day in Athens on Mars Hill. And it continues to be relevant in this present day and hour.

The challenge before the church is to take all the observations of what the values and influences of the culture look like and look at them through the lens of how Christian church ministry specifically relates to the contemporary needs. In any search of relevance there must be not only an identification of the needs but, more importantly, a decision as to how one ministers to those needs?²¹

Jesus, as he walked on earth, saw people's needs. He also understood the fact that his message would have to be carried on by people after him, so he intentionally sought out disciples. In one of the gospel accounts he walked up to two candidates for discipleship and told them outright, "follow me and I will make you fishers of men."²² At that time they were fully employed as fishermen, so it's safe to assume they had a great deal of knowledge about fish. Little did they comprehend that Jesus was proposing to take them into new and unfamiliar waters, where in some sense all their techniques would have to be re- adapted. It would mean new way of thinking, a new approach. They would be no longer aiming to draw in fish, but people. He may have been saying to them that in the past they may have been able to attract fish to their nets, but he was going to teach them how to attract people with their lives. Jesus offered them the chance

²⁰ Romans 12:2, by transforming their minds and following the way of love, Christians can become agents of transformation; of salt and of light.

²¹ Hall, 43

²² The same story is actually recorded in two of the gospels, Matthew 4: 18-20; Mark 1: 16-18 NIV

to follow him. Everything they had learned before would offer the foundational principles for this new kind of fishing. The strategy here was not throwing out everything the disciples had done before but re-conceptualizing it so that, after that, point they would be effective fishers of people, not fish. To understand fish, one might look at the waters; to understand the people, one might look at the culture.

Question Method Thesis

There are several questions I will attempt to answer in my thesis and several types of questions I will address in my thesis. The first question that I have is this: what does effective Christian church ministry look like in contemporary culture? In effect, I will attempt to look at the different ways present-day church ministries are attempting to communicate their message to people in a contemporary culture.

These issues raise certain questions:

1. What are the values of the emerging culture that are most important to understand how the church relates its message to contemporary culture?
2. What are the values of the emerging culture that are most important to understand how the culture will relate to the church and to Christianity?
3. What are the ways that church ministry are attempting to deal with the issue of communicating their message to the emerging culture?

To answer these questions one must first determine in some way what this culture looks like in terms of values. I am proposing that to accurately understand the values of the culture we must trace back to see how the cultural movements affected the culture. To understand what one might mean by postmodernism, one must first understand its roots in modernism. In doing this, I will provide a foundation to attempt to answer the

question what are the ways²³ that present ministries are relaying the Christian message to contemporary culture? And then from there I will attempt to describe what the emerging church will look like if it wants to communicate with the people of the culture. That will be part of the first part of my paper. In doing this I will examine the features of this contemporary culture, which people have called postmodern, and see how understanding the values of the culture are important for communicating to the people in that culture.

In the second part of this paper I have chosen to use a case study approach²⁴ to show in real practical ways what the theory looks like in practice. I chose three ministries that contained what I was looking for. They each contain postmodern elements in them but are not postmodern churches. I don't think there can be such a thing as a postmodern church but maybe I could discuss that in my reflections at the end.

²³ Or forms of ministry. This in effective is the medium.

²⁴ Over the Generational Approach. For my reasoning see Appendix B

Definitions

My whole take on the label of postmodernism is this: The term postmodernism is a term that could mean a great deal of things. I have limited postmodernism to mean the transitional after modernism. The terms of the emerging or contemporary culture describe those people who have been influenced by both modern and postmodern cultural values, it does not mean they have or have not embraced them in any large way. It is important to remember that the culture is in transition and so to define it and assume that people can be characterized solely by the reaction to modern values would be a mistake. In the other scope postmodern concepts and reactions to modernism will be set apart by calling it the postmodern era. Cathy Townley, a Methodist minister who was ordained in Gustavus' Christ Chapel, explained it this way:

Unless a church begins new in this culture, an established church that's able to transition into the new culture will still embrace many parts of the old culture. So in a sense, post modernity includes modernity, at least for the next 10 to 15 years probably.²⁵

The mediums or the methods that message is being presented through are very diverse. It could be worship services, preaching, teaching, communal fellowship, servant evangelism, service projects, mission trips, relationships, small groups, parties. or it could be communicated through medium such as TV and music. The medium is very diverse because the receiver of the message must first be open by the medium before they consider the message.

It is important that the medium be effective. If the medium is to be effective it must be able to open the door of communication between the church and the individual.

²⁵ Cathy Townley, Email to author, soulwasher@aol.com, 18 Apr 2001

To some, it is a revolting thought to use culture to communicate the message of the gospel. But this principle is used as old as the early church in the book of Acts. In Paul's address to the Greeks at Mars Hill, he uses their convictions of truth and values to open the door to the possibility of the validity of what he says. In this way the messenger must understand how to communicate to the unchurched.

By Christian church ministry I mean churches that have roots in Protestant doctrine. It believed by some that the general *message* of the Protestant gospel is the same and is unchangeable, that only the *how* changes. I would like to say while the message is able to stay the same,²⁶ there is a sense that, the part that is emphasized may constantly change and adapt to the cultural need around it. The message may need to be modified as evangelism encounters to a new people group that don't believe what other people had grown up believing. According to George Barna, a research pollster, Americans don't believe in coming a judgment of God, they don't believe Jesus is the only way, they aren't scared of hell and they believe in sin.

The Message for a Contemporary People

In his book Why Christian?, Douglas John Hall has a chapter called "Saved From What? To What?" The world has gotten a glimpse of religion and rejected it for many reasons. Hall's responds to this question from a more liberal than conservative Christianity. Salvation is being saved from the anxiety of purposelessness and meaningfulness, "it speaks to our deepest needs."²⁷ He argues that "when the Christian message is reduced to platitudes about love and forgiveness and hope and so on, the only

²⁶ God loves the world, sin separates people from God, God sent his only son to earth to suffer and to liberate. Jesus died on a cross to save people from their sins and reconcile the world to Himself through the cross, the Father draws people, whoever receives Jesus enters into that promise of salvation.

²⁷ Hall, 48

people it can appeal to are people who haven't experienced the depths of human anguish and need."²⁸ I would add also that with the increase of hopelessness and apathy our society is finding no reason to exist, Salvation for them also includes being saved from a possible human tendency toward self-destruction.

From a more conservative perspective, the Christian message confronts sin of pride: the pride of self-centeredness and self-righteousness. First: the self-centeredness of living hedonistic lives where the purpose of life is to live for yourself. Second: the self-righteousness of actually believing that a person is able to save themselves by the things that they do.

Incarnational Theology

Traditional evangelical theology has hinged on the Cross, even more than the Resurrection in many ways. The Incarnation of Jesus²⁹ has increasingly become more popular with the emerging generations.³⁰ The incarnation means *participation* in our life, God's *identification* with us, God's *sharing* in our creaturely condition, "our flesh."³¹ The contemporary question for present postmodern world may be "could Jesus empathize with us?" Where as with some traditional and orthodox churches, God appeared so transcendent. Even the picture people get from Christianity often is so transcendent. Hall describes "the 'Jesus' of televangelists, for instance, is usually so 'divine', so powerful, so perfect that he is far more like your problemless friends than like the one who stands along you."³² In the coldness of life people have become so community

²⁸ Ibid., 49

²⁹ for a look at Incarnational Theology Applied to Ministry see Appendix H

³⁰ A forum with Carlos Aguilar, Vincent Bacote, Andy Crouch, Catherine Crouch, Sherri King, and Chris Simmons "The Antimoderns," *Christianity Today*, November 13, 2000

³¹ Hall, 52

³² Ibid., 53

starved that they now search for community more than then before. Their community will eventually shape their identity: who they are, what they believe, how they live.

Even in a community, more than words people need embodied words. Jesus never said, "Man does not live on bread alone but on every word [*logos*] that proceeds from the mouth of God." No, he used the word [*rhema*] to explain that the word of God is a living reality; it becomes incarnate as it enters into the lives of people. God himself did not remain *logos* but became living *logos* for people, giving them reality not just words on a page. Eugene Peterson, author of The Message (Bible), explains the great chasm in the Western world in the way words are used.

It is the split between words that *describe* the world and reality from as much distance possible through generalities and abstractions, and words that *express* the world and reality by entering into it, participating in it through metaphor and command. Describing words can be set under the Latin term *scientia*, expressing words under the term *sapientia* – or in English, science and wisdom. Science is information stored in the head that can be used impersonally; wisdom is knowledge that comes from the heart, which can only be lived personally in relationships.³³

What was it that Paul said that true faith in Jesus Christ comes from? Jesus illustrated that true faith was like being connected to a spring of water, he promised that those who believe would never go thirsty³⁴ and those that believe from within them will flow streams of living water.³⁵ Faith in Jesus Christ is not about believing a bunch of facts about Jesus. Although I disagree with Marcus Borg's "historical" Jesus, he ends one of his books with every very profound statement, "Believing...does not therefore consist of giving one's mental assent to something but involves a much deeper level of one's

³³ Peterson, "Wisdom and Knowledge," *Christian Century*, Dec.15, 1999 reprinted, *Christian Writers*, 200

³⁴ John 6: 35 NIV

³⁵ John 7: 38 NIV

self.”³⁶ Commitment to God will result in the changed life and actions will follow. Jesus challenged people to put into practice what they heard, not just listen to his words.³⁷ True followers will give themselves to God with everything they have.

³⁶ Borg, Marcus, *Meeting Jesus Again For the First Time*, last page. Borg also cites the fact that the German word immediately rooted to English is *belieben*. *Belieben* does not mean “to believe,” but rather “to belove.”

³⁷ Matthew 7: 24 NIV

Pre-Modern and Modernism

To begin any discussion on postmodernism, we must recognize that postmodernism is a reaction to, it that it comes after modernism. It may even be helpful to describe what life was like before modernism. In the age of pre-modernism³⁸ mystery was celebrated and anything that was not understood could be attributed to divine working. One author explains it this way,

The Universe was the playground of the gods or God. Life could only be explained in terms of the supernatural... The only way to bring order to chaotic state was to befriend or placate the gods, thus ensuring their cooperation to fight evil.³⁹

The pre-modern period existed in a time when people saw the divine as the source of all movement. In this cosmic holism, human reason and science had claim or ability to answer the questions of the universe. The search for answers was not found in logic but in mysticism. The period known as the Enlightenment brought an end to the pre-modern period.

Foundation of Modernism: Reason

Modernity attempted to establish culture and life on a universal and objective foundation. Over against the illusions, prejudices, and fanaticism of the past, modernity offered Reason (with a capital R) to scrutinize critically every claim and to ground the edifice of knowledge... Reason provided a set of rules and criteria for correct thinking about Reality, thus accessing Absolute Truth. In addition modernity proffered the hope that through Reason humans could understand the cosmos, establish social peace and improve their condition.⁴⁰

Reason was the light that lit all the other matches. Many others have called the Enlightenment the Age of Reason. The major father figure, who helped develop the reliability of the human mind, was Rene Descartes (1596-1650). Descartes eventually

³⁸ many suppose it to be from where time began to the 1400's

³⁹ Nash, 13-14

⁴⁰ Oklohm, 12

was able to create a separation between the cosmos into material and mental (or spiritual) substances. To get to that point,

[Descartes] doubted every single thing he had ever known in a grand effort to uncover the one thing that could not be doubted. He concluded the doubting mind itself was that single thing undoubtable thing and that human reason was the only credible path to knowledge.⁴¹

Hence he stated with absolute certainty, "I think, therefore I am." [It] yielded an unquestionable certainty and so it became the foundation on which to build a secure rational structure."⁴² As a result, Descartes divided reality into a dualistic system of material and mental substances.⁴³

Second in the sphere of influence was Immanuel Kant (1724-1804).

Kant was especially concerned with epistemological questions; questions dealing with what knowledge is and how we know what we know...he began asking not how the mind conformed itself to the world but instead how the world conformed itself to the mind.⁴⁴

Like Descartes before him dividing the cosmos into mind and matter, Kant divided the realm of knowledge into two categories that of pure and practical reason, of faith and knowledge of the scientific and the religious.⁴⁵

Science and Objective Reality

This foundationalism was of the conviction that there were beliefs or experiences that were in and of themselves beyond doubt and upon which systems of belief could be constructed with absolute certainty.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Ibid., 15

⁴² Grenz, 64

⁴³ article in Allen by James B. Miller, "The Emerging Postmodern World," 4

⁴⁴ Ibid, 4

⁴⁵ Ibid, 5

⁴⁶ Webber, 19

This was all under the assumption that there was only *one* objective reality that could be known. And after all doubt was supposedly removed the rationalistic scientist was free to discover the universe as it was with the tested scientific method to measure all things and declare the objective universe.

Modern Separation: Dualism

As a result of the Enlightenment foundation humans were viewed as purely material (matter) and therefore only biological machines. The world was seen as a great machine as supported by the work of Isaac Newton (1642-1727). As a result events of history were viewed only in terms of cause and effect. This created two large rifts: 1) human reason excluded spiritual reality and 2) dualism became a even more destructive element in culture as evidenced by people loss of intrinsic value due to their biological status.

Because of the high view of the mind ability to figure out reality, everything came under the scope of scientific method. If it could be proven as scientifically true, it was part of the objective truth of the universe. The Enlightenment

proceeded from the assumption that all true knowledge was factual, value-free, and neutral. Over against facts were values, which were not objectively true, the holding of which was a matter of taste. Religion was, in the course of time, relegated to this category since it rested on subjective notions that could not be proved correct.⁴⁷

Optimism Toward Progress

A strong conviction after the Enlightenment was that rational humans could solve virtually ever imaginable problem using the human mind. This of course proceeded from the assumption that all problems were in principle solvable. They were convinced that given the right perspective (theirs) of reality the world could benefit from such an

⁴⁷ Bosch, 1991, 266

industrial and technological advances. The future looked very optimistic as people began to dream of a possible utopian society. They worked from the assumption of Locke who believed that when people were born their minds were as blank slates, without any moral convictions whatsoever.⁴⁸ This lead the thinkers to believe that if people were given knowledge through education they would grow to be rational and moral individuals that benefited society.

⁴⁸ Grenz, 75

Description of the Modern Church

The modern church has many different faces. I would like to concentrate on the Evangelical face of the modern church because it illustrates the influence of modern theory and it further goes to show how the theory becomes applied in a practical way. Not all of the modern elements of church were bad, per se. One might wish to argue at length that point, however I merely wish to describe what I have seen and what I have read about the modern church. This is merely a description, it is not a personal critique.

Rationalism and the Scientific Mind

Building off of the premise that science dictated reality, the modern church soon found themselves intellectually separated from the modern world because faith had been relegated as not part of objective truth. And so the modern church reacted in two ways that I have seen: One, is it committed intellectual suicide by withdrawing from the culture arena. And the other is that in an attempt to combat the scientific rationalists, Modern Apologetics set up to prove God and prove the Christian faith using the context of scientific framework of the modern world. There were some who at times attempted to scientifically prove the Bible was the inerrant word of God, these were referred to as fundamentalists. Their response was to fight with the scientific evidence of the Bible. Recently there was a book that was published called *Case For Christ*, by Lee Strobel,⁴⁹ that argued the historical proofs of Jesus. Strobel, similar to Josh McDowell, started out as a skeptic and examined the evidence for the Christian faith and found it to be true. They each argue from a modern perspective of the world where if people were rational and they just knew the evidence then they would be convinced of the Bible's truthfulness and

⁴⁹ Strobel, Lee, *The Case for Christ: a journalist's personal investigation of the evidence for Jesus*. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, 1998.

would become Christians. In this sense modern Apologetics worked very hard to find themselves accepted among the elite scientists and philosophers debates in arguing for the Christian faith and the proof of God's existence.

From that high view of rationalism, came forth formulas that could reduce a message into simple terms that people could understand. The modern church came forth with plans of Salvation. The Four Alls, Steps to Peace with God, The Four Spiritual Laws were all attempts to summarize the Christian message into an easy and presentable way. Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade a group that evangelizes and trains college age students to grow and multiply. In his book he showed how easy witnessing could be.⁵⁰ The tracks were based on the foundational conviction that if people could just be given the facts then answering a few hindering questions with rational answers, there was no one who wouldn't want to become a Christian. Depending on which side you come from "witnessing as an event" may have been an attempt to make things more efficient or it may have been just easier. Viewing witnessing as an event, usually implied going some place to share one's faith. Sometimes it meant telling the "gospel" to a total stranger.⁵¹

Part of the modern influences created exerted efforts to affect as many people as possible. In the church this became adopted as well. The church developed mass Evangelism that was said to have yielded mass results. This included events such as Revivals, crusades, and other evangelistic services.

Since about 1790, revivals, crusades and other forms of evangelistic services have been a uniquely American form of Christian renewal... They became part of the rhythm of life, offering a seasonal opportunity for

⁵⁰ *Witnessing Without Fear*, in his book he included advice such as "always pre-suppose a positive response." In his book Bright took the person through understanding the formula to witnessing.

⁵¹ Nash, 58

spiritual self-appraisal and the sharing of the Christian faith beyond the church walls.⁵²

In revivals Americans discovered their own sinfulness and were called back to God.

These types of services are typically characterized by passionate and confrontational preaching about Jesus, sin, the devil, holiness, and hell. At the end of the service there is usually an altar call or a call to make a decision for the Lord.⁵³

Dualism

Modernism only reinforced the duality that had existed in the church earlier between secular and sacred; body and spirit. Similar to Hellenistic and Gnostic thought the modern mind/spirit was seen as superior to the body.⁵⁴ In the modern world the mind was seen as more important than the emotions or how someone felt about a particular subject. This affected the church later on so that the church ended up reinforcing the modern separation of the sacred and the secular. Perhaps the thinking was this world is passing away, who cares about the minor problems like poverty and suffering, we're going to heaven. John Stott, a well respected conservative bible teacher, explains it this way:

We often give the impression that if a young Christian man is really keen for Christ he will undoubtedly become a foreign missionary, that if he is not as keen as that he will stay home and become a pastor, that if he lacks the dedication to be a pastor, he will no doubt serve as a doctor or teacher, while those who end up in social work or the media or (worst of all) in politics are not far removed from serious backsliding.⁵⁵

⁵² Ibid, 56

⁵³ Ibid, 56

⁵⁴ Walsh and Middleton in their book *Transforming Vision* attribute the Hellenistic thought to the intellectual climate of the day (109) and then go on to argue that Augustine's temporal vs. eternal (110) affected the dualism further. Later on it lead to some extreme ascetic dualists that saw the Christian life primarily as an escape from secular life (114).

⁵⁵ Stott, 1975, 201

Somehow the Spiritual became more important than the secular. Because the Spiritual need for Salvation was more important than physical needs the message of the gospel was at times reduced to “turn or burn” or “your in or your out.” Focus on soul of person more important than the focus on the person as a whole person.⁵⁶ The simple message was to avoid Hell, become a Christian. Some of my older friends have called it “fire insurance.” Some of them have said that the reason they are Christians is to be sure, in case there is a hell. The message seemed clear; it was an approach that was largely based on fear.

The church became the place to get people “saved.” People would be invited to church they would hear the Evangelistic message and they would get saved.⁵⁷ The church further reinforced the dualism so that church became altogether sacred and the world was not. Church is where you talk about God, the world was for talking about worldly things, but every once in a while people would journey out of the doors into the world to win someone to Christ from the demonic hold on the nation. Some claimed that America was God’s New Israel.⁵⁸ Author Robert Nash reflected on the dilemma people had for praying for the conflict in the Middle East. Ultimately they it turned into “us or rather U.S. vs. them”⁵⁹

Modern churches can be more method, formula, or program driven, they rely on what worked for other people. The church was geared to be efficient just like the modern world it was run like an industry or business. In this way it was also optimistic about the future. While in some circles there was a strong emphasis on the church rising to glory,

⁵⁶ an example of this is Evangelist Ray Comfort, Living Waters Publication, <http://www.raycomfort.com>

⁵⁷ Nash, 61

⁵⁸ Long, 30

⁵⁹ Nash, 64

there was little attention to the increasing need to minister to the poor. Things such as prayer, bible studies, and evangelistic services were seen as more helpful for building God's kingdom than feeding the poor and being with those who were suffering. The church believed that they were God's hands and feet, but they did very little to reach out and engage people in the world. Rather they considered prayer more important than action.

Some churches accepted the privatization of religion and the secularization of culture and so church became a small protective community; to keep the believers in and the world's influences out. As the church so it's members sang the song, "me and Jesus got our own thing going"

In the modern church, authority was based on the title. Everyone was to submit to the word that came from the pulpit because they were God's man; the designated authority for God to speak through. Authority was earned through degrees and scholarship at Seminaries. The preaching was scholarly and was deeply expositional where the word was examined very closely. Modern preaching was largely informational and instructional.

Postmodernism

"Actually, the term postmodern doesn't describe our era accurately. We're both postmodern and hypermodern. We're both rational and relational. We're both linear and non-linear. We're both physical and spiritual. We're both mystical and prepositional. Postmodernism is paradoxical. It's not an either/or thinking. It's both/and thinking."⁶⁰

The purpose of understanding postmodernism is to show how it specifically relates to the church as it was shown in the breakdown of modernism. So what do you think of when you hear the word postmodern? Let me describe two examples of how postmodernism has been met with two different types of Christian responses.

Example 1: A friend came up to me a while ago and told me about a play he had seen that combined the story of Jesus with current technology. In this play he told me there had been a scene where someone was writing an email in the beginning of it before telling the story of Jesus. "It was really postmodern," he told me.

Example 2: While visiting a church recently I asked a man who appeared to be somewhat of an elder if he understood what postmodern was and how it was influencing our culture. He replied that he was a seminary student and had done a lot of study on postmodernism. As we began talking about postmodernism he seemed to get a little upset. He considered that relativism and pluralism were synonymous with postmodernism. He then to my surprise, he preached to me that he believed that Jesus Christ was the only way to God and that that flew in the face of postmodernism. He then finished preaching to me the whole gospel, as he understood it, satisfied he had defended the faith from postmodernism.

To one person postmodernism had to do with the culture and the mix of technology; a juxtaposition of the past and the present. To the other it was a battle zone of worldviews where it was in direct opposition to the Christian faith. How is it that two people could be at such opposite ends? It is all in how you understand the term postmodern. I think the first thing we need to do is examine what I mean by the word postmodern?

⁶⁰ Pantoja, "Please Don't Start Another Postmodern Ministry!" *Next Wave*, Nov. 2000

There is postmodernism that has to do with academic/philosophical content and then there is postmodern that is part of a cultural phenomenon. Some think in terms of its academic and philosophical content, From the European philosophy of Jacques Derrida, Michael Foucault, and Richard Rorty, even tracing postmodern philosophy further to include the first rejection of the Enlightenment by Fredrich Nietzsche. Who are these people and why does it matter that they are major postmodern philosophers? Because this paper is on Christian church ministry I will try to restrict the scope of the postmodern lens to how it relates to society and the church.⁶¹ For this paper I would like to look at it as how it affects the cultural movement. As to how much the theory has directly influenced the cultural shift is an interesting question that will have to be left to the scholars to debate over.

Development of the After-Modern Era

It's easier to answer the question what postmodern is not, than it is to define what exactly postmodern is. The typical answers are it is a response to the turn away from modernism. As one author explains,

Postmodernism refers to an intellectual mood and an array of cultural expressions that call into question the ideals, principles, and values that lay at the heart of the modern mind-set. Postmodernity, in turn, refers to an emerging epoch, the era in which we are living, the time when postmodern outlook increasingly shapes our society.”⁶²

This is merely one-way of interpreting the cultural changes. Granted, there are a few terms that are a given if one is to properly understand the culture. But for the most part the philosophical theories of language constructs and deconstructionism is absent.

⁶¹ For good books on the Subject from an Moderate Evangelical read Stanley Grenz

⁶²Grenz, 12

Post-Reason and Post-Science

Modernism set to prove that reality conformed itself to the mind leaving the modernist with objective reality or truth. Postmodernism has sought to repudiate the notion that reality can be viewed objectively, by challenging that the observer can never be separated from that which is observed. Postmodernism argues that the mind conforms itself to what it perceives as reality, this is known as Constructivism. Postmodernism argued that experience, not reason would dictate how reality will appear or be perceived by our minds. To this the mind and the mind's ability to look at objectively at something are highly suspected. Skepticism and uncertainty take the place of objective truth.

"There is no doubt that all our knowledge begins with experience." Immanuel Kant⁶³

This reaction to modernism is not as some have labeled it anti-intellectualism or withdraw from academics rather it is a shift to a focus more on experience and emotions than on the absorption of information.

Post-Metanarrative

In modernism there was only one objective reality that people tried to explain with stories. These stories were to make sense out of life by providing an interpretation of the world from its beginning to its end.⁶⁴ But with the postmodern rejection of the one way of looking at reality the metanarrative has been replaced by many narratives; many stories.⁶⁵ Because of postmodernism there are many stories and many realities. For some at the core of reality is uncertainty (or indeterminacy). To them it is an unfathomable mystery. Life is a mystery; the future is also a mystery. As a result of the destruction of

⁶³ Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, 2nd ed., trans Norman Kemp Smith (London: MacMillan, 1973), 41 quoted in Sweet, PM, 32

⁶⁴ Webber, 19

⁶⁵ Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*

the grand story, people have discovered that they are not autonomous. There is a return to tribal or small communities where people can regain a sense of orientation.

Post-Optimistic Progression

Since the Golden Age of the Enlightenment and the quest for progress, through optimistic autonomous rationalism, our world has seen more violence than all the other centuries in all of history.⁶⁶ Yet people were not able to hide from this reality because of technology. The reality of suffering and the lack of progress became very evident indeed. In the collapse of space and time the far away and distant became "in your face." "Television brought the brutality of war into the comfort of the living room. Vietnam was lost in the living rooms of America- not on the battlefields of Vietnam." McLuhan⁶⁷ As C.S. has observed, technological advances have not made better people, "technological advances have only made people more educated devils." All of the arguments that modern society was solving the problems of the world became less and less as more and more reports like the ones describing the atrocities of the Germans during World War II came into the U.S. Technology has continued to collapse the distance between space and time. In article after article of the Generation that has grown up in this world has bitterly struggled to gain a sense of hope as they stared at the dark future they lay ahead. They want to have faith in the future, not fear of the future. The postmodern generation has experienced what Stanley Grenz calls a "gnawing pessimism."⁶⁸

⁶⁶ where to FIND the necessary INFO

⁶⁷ McLuhan, Marshall (1911-80), (Canadian communications theorist.) *Montreal Gazette*, May 16, 1975).

⁶⁸ Grenz, 13

Post-Controlling

Through the Enlightenment humans saw themselves as the top of a giant hierarchy. They had climbed the evolutionary ladder and had arrived on the top. They spanned the horizon and declared that through their thinking and rational capacity they could solve every problem imaginable and modernize the world. In the pursuit of progress people often became tools, they were stripped of their human value, and were seen only by cost/benefit economic value. But most of all the issue was about control. "The issue is never the issue, the issue is always control."

In the movie *Jurassic Park*, a story about people's attempts to engineer and control dinosaurs, we can see the modernist dependence control. John Hammond, the park director is speaking to Dr. Sattler. Hammond realizes that he has failed. The dinosaurs freely roaming around the island causing havoc. He tells her that his mistake was to too dependent on technology.

Hammond: "Now the next time it will be different.

The next time it will be flawless..."

Dr. Sattler: "John it's still the flea circus. It's all an illusion."

Hammond: "When we have control!"

Dr. Sattler: "You never had control! That's the illusion."

Dr. Sattler is able to topple the rationalist's belief in progress with one all encompassing swoop. "It's all an illusion!" to think that modern's mindset of control will fix the problems in the world. To think that controlling others will make for a better world. The generation after modernism has rejected that illusion, that controlling others is wrong.

Post-Dualism

In the modern view people were seen as material creatures, because of the Enlightenment thinkers, mind and matter. In the modern view Humans were viewed only in terms of what the mind could perceive, this excluded a spiritual dimension. Modernism, humans were seen as purely material and therefore only biological machines.⁶⁹ The Enlightenment ideal they were dispassionate, autonomous, rational individuals.⁷⁰ This worldview that existed was a two-tier worldview. It completely broke apart the spiritual from the rest of reality. The postmodern world also focused on the nature of humans. But they saw humans in very different terms than the modern world did. In postmodernism humans are primarily social beings by nature.⁷¹ In postmodernism the Spirit is included as part of the whole person.

⁶⁹ McCullum, 22

⁷⁰ Grenz, 14

⁷¹ McCullum, 32

Description of the Emerging Church

In this post (after) modern world, the emerging church needs to be Biblically absolute but culturally relevant.⁷² The modern church has prepared for a frontal assault assuming that the world would encounter them on the modern church's terms. It didn't happen. The challenges before emerging churches are many. The question that is before the church is: what are the emphases of the emerging church that relate to the after modern world.

EPIC

Leonard Sweet, a futurist and Christian who speaks at many conferences across denominational lines, in one of his recent books compares his new model for ministry, EPIC, to the ABC game show *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* [It] has successfully transitioned⁷³

1. From rational to experiential- the music, lights, drama, suspense
2. From representative to participatory- "lifelines" for the contestant blur the lines between viewers and the contestant.
3. From word-based to image-driven- image of a Million Dollars
4. From individual to connecting the individual to the communal

Authentic Lives, Authentic Relationships

"Use whatever language you will but you can never say anything but what you are."

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

The postmodern world threw out the emphasis on reason and rationalism; this means that the scientific and logical Apologetics of modern approach have been replaced by an emphasis on the authenticity of the lives of Christians living for God.

⁷² Sweet, 2000, xxi

⁷³ Sweet, xxi

We do expect to draw people primarily from our own generation - but by being ourselves, rather than changing to meet the needs of a target group," part of the core values of *The Bridge*, Michigan.⁷⁴

This generation can see a sell-job from a mile away. Ultimately, they do not want the X-treme; they want the authentic.⁷⁵

An authentic life implies real people who are relational and honest about what they can and cannot do. From the books I read and my experience one of the most powerful words to say, with your life,⁷⁶ to a non-Christian, may be the word, "I care." My friend Heidi Wegner opened me up to this when she used to tell me: "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

Her point was profound: It is that, to her, the words that are being sent aren't as important, for evangelism, as the attitudes that are being sent. She emphasized the life that she lived embodied the truthfulness of the words she spoke and that the life she lived also affected the outcome of whether or not her message would be received or ignored/tuned out. For her the issue had clearly become one of trust.

For the Christian in the modern world the more knowledge one had in apologetics the better off one was at defending and attacking their opponents beliefs. In the postmodern world the greatest apologetic for the Christian faith may be based more on the medium than the message; on authentic relationships more than on Bible proofs. The emerging church will be strongly relational, it will be transparent in many areas and it will be made up of real people who don't live self-righteously and fake Spirituality.

Community

⁷⁴ described as a modern first century church, see <http://www.thebridgechurch.com/main.html>

⁷⁵ Hopkins, David "The Deception of the 'X-treme' Church," *Next-Wave*, Oct. 1999

⁷⁶ We can communicate through speech, but in the postmodern context, if the life doesn't support the message then the medium, that is the person, will replace the words that are being conveyed.

What the members of the next generation want to see is a people who live out the gospel in wholesome, authentic, and healing relationships. Focusing on the example of Jesus and the apostles, a Christian gospel for the postmodern age will invite others to become participants...⁷⁷

The goal is an inclusive community where all are welcome and none are excluded.

Numerous churches have adopted similar themes:

PEOPLE MATTER MOST (to God and to us). Not programs. Not growth. Not facilities. Not goals and objectives.⁷⁸

A place to belong... a place to become.⁷⁹

Let no child be lost... There is a place for you.⁸⁰

No one stands alone.⁸¹

The world can be a lonely place, and the emerging church is offering community. This move back to community is said to be the re-capturing of the fact that we by nature social beings. In an organic world there can be people who are "islands unto themselves," everyone affects someone. There is a group of theologians⁸² who believe that it will be the community in the postmodern world will set the tone for the beliefs of the people. It is said that, "beliefs are held to be true within the context of the communities that espouse them."⁸³ In the postmodern world in many cases, belonging will proceed believing. More than that the community will offer the people hope, encouragement, and love where it is needed. Ultimately the emerging church will emphasize community.

⁷⁷ Grenz, 169

⁷⁸ The core values of the church, *The River*

⁷⁹ The core theme of *Wooddale Church* in Eden Prairie, Minnesota

⁸⁰ Theme at Christ Church in Florida.

⁸¹ I found this core theme at a church, but can't remember which one.

⁸² Some have been identified as part of Evangelical Left, however for the most part they are those who have accepted postmodern ideas about the redefining of the nature of truth. Among them is Stanley Grenz.

⁸³ Grenz, 15

Experience

Sweet wrote: "*Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* is less a game show than an experience." As the viewer watches, through music, lights, suspense, they are brought into an experience with the contestants and the studio audience. If someone were to say that churches need to offer people an experience they would be accused of putting on a show. This may be true, but the fact remains the words and information have only created a yearning for deep spiritual hunger in the lives of those who have grown up after modernism. In the postmodern world, experience comes before explanation. Largely when people explain without an experience to point to it falls.⁸⁴ In the older modern church, "The primary message from the pulpit was first, Believe what is true, and second, Do what is right. The combination of the right beliefs and right behavior equaled true spirituality."⁸⁵ "When popular spirituality has outstripped traditional religion in the public eye, the church has some serious questions to ask," states Pam Fickenscher, pastor of *Spirit Garage*, MN. In the emerging church liturgy is not rejected but embraced provided it connects people to the spiritual dimension of God.

People aren't coming to our churches, because all they expect to hear is information. Postmoderns are not looking for information about God. We are suffering from an information overload.⁸⁶

The church is the revealer of God to the world, true Spiritual connections are found in the church, Christians insist, yet the world is not going into the church. The emerging church will offer Spiritual dimension of worship where people touch and are touch by the reality of God. With that the postmodern rejection of the objective truth has created a re-

⁸⁴ Urbana Missions Conference 2000, Workshop: "Ministry in a postmodern world" by Rick Richardson (author of *Evangelism Outside the Box : New Ways to Help People Experience the Good News*, Intervarsity Press: Downers Grove, Ill.)

⁸⁵ Edwards, 121

⁸⁶ Mike Slaughter, pastor of Ginghamburg mega church in Ohio.

emergence of the notion of the "mystery of God." In the postmodern world, skepticism rules the day and that is because many believe that at the heart of the universe exists a mystery. It is the unknowable. The most anyone can ever be in the postmodern world is an agnostic.

Story

In this post-Christian world, the grand Christian story has not only been leveled and now exists among a sea of many other stories, but it is becoming very quickly forgotten. One pastor said he used "abductive reasoning" to grab the attention of his postmodern audience by communicating his message through story. He explained that when the story is told, different than deductive or inductive methods, the listeners became abducted from their known worlds into another world.⁸⁷ "An important task of contemporary apologetics is to argue that Christians can tell a better story," states Alan Jacobs. Recent Christian authors have hit this note over and over. Filmmaker Terry Lindvall has said, "the next century belongs to those who can tell the best stories-- perhaps the next generation of Christian writers will have fewer sociologists and more novelists."⁸⁸

One author calls for the church to have narrative discipleship:

A disciple is one whose life trajectory shows that he is being caught up in a Story larger than his own... A disciple lives with reckless hope... And a disciple is convinced in her heart that her life is not a series of random, unconnected events, but that she is a player in the greatest drama of all time, the drama of a lovesick God spurned by his beloved... They explain that "Narrative discipleship is not a battle plan, a job description, or a series of workbooks to be mastered. It is... a Story."⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Brian McLaren quoted in Jones, 29

⁸⁸ Cox, Harvey, "The Warring Visions of the Religious Right," *The Atlantic*, November 1995, 84

⁸⁹ Todd Hahn and David Verhagen, *GenXers After God*, 18

Post-Industrial Progressive

While the modern world had its emphasis on the individual the postmodern world has not abandoned emphasis on the individual. Every person matters and every person is valuable. Similar to the emphasis of the culture, people are not expendable. They are valued as precious in God's sight and they are seen not just as able to contribute their labor and their gifts to the church, but they are seen as possessing unique gifts that will unlock their potential. The purpose of the emerging church leadership is not to control them but to empower them. Leadership, in the emerging church, will lead the people by example in their service, their love, their conduct, and their lives.

As part of the reaction to the institutional modern church, many people struggle with the feeling that the church is about controlling people. Maybe some can shift the blame to the systems and structures, but people are still responsible for those systems and structures.

The devil dwells in the urge to control rather than to liberate the human soul. One can hardly live in these closing years of the twentieth century without realizing how the forces of control have gathered.⁹⁰

The emerging church will not squelch the potential of people or try and takeover it will give people a tremendous amount of freedom and give them room to doubt without being scrutinized. On the other side, the emerging church model will not be controlling either. The emerging church will find itself post-denominational and post-factions.

In the Christendom era, when the denominational machinery worked smoothly and there was enough money to add staff, the web of control was not only tolerable but even rewarding... In the post-Christendom era when the denominational machinery is not

⁹⁰ Eugene Kennedy, *Jesus Alive in the Gospel of Matthew*, p.8 quoted in Manning, 140

working and there is barely enough money to pay for property maintenance, the web of control is intolerable."⁹¹

The emerging church will have plenty of flexibility and a move more towards the equality of networking and away from the domination of ownership.

Post-Dualism

This may be the first generation that repudiates the compartmentalization of the sacred and secular. Postmodern world has blurred the two so that faith is carried into the marketplace. One author called it this break up between the sacred and secular activities Evangelical Gnosticism. The emerging church will spend more time with the world by inviting people to come along side of them and share their lives, not just a church service. The most mundane of activities may be looked at as giving glory to God. In this way the place of service and work will be as equally important as going to church.

An element of postmodern is the juxtaposition of two or more things. Some refer to this as an eclectic mix of tradition and technology. It is not tradition that the emerging after-moderns reject, it is empty ritual and tradition that they are repelled by. GK Chesterton, a respected Christian writer, said it this way somewhere, "Tradition is the living faith of those now dead, and Traditionalism is the dead faith of those now living." This emphasis is in accessing the Ancient Christian tradition and mixing it with the present culture. In this blur of the line between sacred and secular some of the things that are being redeemed in the church are art, music, and dance. The expressions of art, music, and dance are extremely diverse. At one church I went to they had three people

⁹¹ Thomas Bandy co-author of *Growing Spiritual Redwoods* and part of Easum, Bandy, & Associates. Between 1988 and 1999 their training events have prepared more than 75,000 church leaders in the U.S. and Canada for ministry in the 21st century. They help leaders organize priorities, identify goals, innovate new strategies, and motivate congregations to address the spiritually yearning, institutionally alienated seekers of today. For more information

painting during the worship service and to left of them a boy was molding clay on a potters wheel. The reason church's are becoming more connected to the art world is because it means more people who can have an opportunity to use their talents creating something.

This emerging generation is moving toward a new emphasis on faith and works. Not that their wasn't ever an emphasis on this before but now this serves as another apologetic for the Christian faith. People are now looking at the life of a Christian to determine the truthfulness of their message.

If we could unequivocally prove to people that the proposition that God exists is objectively true, the inhabitants of our culture would yawn... what our world is waiting for is an embodied witness that demonstrates why anyone should care about any of this in the first place.⁹²

The culture is looking for the authentic embodiment of the living message lived out in the lives of believers. The great shift in this thinking is now that faith affects every part of life and every part of life makes you who you are. This part of the reaction to the modern church challenges the church to feed the poor, take care of widows and orphans, and stop discarding issues of people's needs. To add to that, as a reaction to the modern division of the spiritual and the physical this generation seeks healing for their spirit, their mind, and their body. I get the sense that people are tired of hearing about how much people in the church "care about their soul," when they seem to pay no attention to the day to day needs in their lives. Postmodernism questions the division of separating people soul's from their body and demands ministry that is Holistic; that which ministers to Spirit, soul, and body.

⁹² Philip Kenneson is an author and scholarly writer that wrote a book Selling Out the Church : The Dangers of Church Marketing, Abington Press and also wrote Life on the Vine : Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit in Christian Community, Intervarsity Press

Love “the Other”

Another challenge that presents itself has recently been the attention of many postmodern thinkers. Liberal Christianity and the world seemed to have a greater grasp on the social nature of churches action to the world than the churches themselves. Churches need to regain the biblical principle of loving the “other.”

Miroslav Volf, a Croatian theologian, believes that it is time for the church to “place otherness at the center of the theological reflection.”⁹³ He draws attention to Elie Wiesel’s description of the stranger as

...Someone who suggests the unknown, the prohibited, the beyond; he seduces, he attracts, he wounds – he leaves...The stranger represents what you are not, what you cannot be, simply because you are not he...The stranger is the other. He is not bound by your laws, by your memories; his language is not yours, nor his silence.⁹⁴

Nash goes on to state, “Ironically, the church itself was intended to live the “other.” Christians were to be in the world but not of the world. Instead, Christians quickly identified with the world.”⁹⁵

One Christian writer reflects on the postmodern recapturing that humanity's kaleidoscopic diversity is made in the imago Dei,

As a postmodern Christian, I must reckon with the fact that a substantial aspect of my faithfulness in reflecting the imago Dei will be my relationships, especially with those who, racially or otherwise, are different from me... But this extends beyond my own circle of relationships into the church. If the church is indeed a diverse body that requires variety in order to flourish, then the celebration of diversity is actually necessary for ecclesial health. There is simply no way that the church can thrive if everyone is

⁹³ Miroslav Volf, “Exclusion and Embrace: Theological Reflections in the Wake of ‘Ethnic Cleansing,’ in William A. Dyrness, *Emerging Voices in Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 23

⁹⁴ Wiesel, Elie, *From the Kingdom of Memory: Reminiscences* (NY: Summit Books, 1990), 59

⁹⁵ Nash, 42

identical. Diversity in a community is as vital as organs in a human body.”⁹⁶

Recently, among evangelical authors post-conservative, there have been numerous books that have claimed that the real sin in the Christian church has been that the sin of exclusion.⁹⁷ It has virtually destroyed the essential Christian idea to love the other.⁹⁸ They agree with Volf, “The real sinner is not the outcast, but the one who casts the other out.”⁹⁹ In their mind they see Jesus as accepting of everyone and there no conditions to the love of God. Contemporary Christian authors write entire books about how much God loves people and criticize the transgressors of exclusion, self-righteousness, and legalism. This view is summed up in Brennan Manning’s popular book The Ragamuffin Gospel, “The gospel of grace announces: forgiveness precedes repentance. The sinner is accepted before he pleads for mercy. It is already granted. He need only receive it.”¹⁰⁰ Another characteristic of the emerging church will be that they will offer open arms to people that are different then themselves.

⁹⁶ Bacote, Vince “Coming to Terms with my Otherness,” re:generation quarterly, vol 5, no.2, 1999

⁹⁷ The conditions of which were created by modern ideas.

⁹⁸ Nash, 41

⁹⁹ Volf, 32

¹⁰⁰ Manning, 188-189

Case Studies

A significant shift has occurred. The ministries I choose are merely a sample of what the attempts to build a church that reaches the unchurched, the displaced, and the seekers, looks like. This is not focused on merely one denomination or a number of denominations, which is not the issue. The issue is that these and many other churches have made a conscious effort to minister to the contemporary culture.

One of the emphases of the postmodern world shift that Leonard Sweet emphasizes is "the double ring" phenomenon of postmodernism.¹⁰¹ He calls it a strong element of postmodernism: to have two things that are opposites happen at the same time and not be contradictory. Sweet describes it as someone ringing the front and then back door at virtually the same time. "The postmodern," he says, "always rings twice." The double ring is in its essence, a paradox. It's not a compromise, it's a radical commitment to each edge, and there is no middle. From Sweet's perspective the modern world mainly consisted of either/or, the postmodern world is both/and. Paradox is re-introduced in the postmodern world.

There are three types of ministries I will be looking at for my case studies. Two are new churches that have been born within the last few years. These ministries represent new churches that were created for the specific task of being contemporary and reaching the people that are strongly influenced contemporary culture values. The other choice is a ministry that has been around for a while but has recently become more tuned into the postmodern affected aspects of culture.

¹⁰¹ Sweet, ST 1999, 27

I selected three church ministries to write this paper on based on their size and on their contemporary approaches to church ministry. Hosanna is located south of the Twin Cities in Lakeville, Minnesota. It is a modern mega church church, with a contemporary feel and a desire to be more culturally relevant. *Spirit Garage* is located uptown Minneapolis. It is a missionary church plant that meets in a Theater Garage. Another church, the House of Mercy is located downtown St. Paul. It meets in the First Baptist church and aims to draw the skeptical and the cynical.

I decided that by selecting and examining a few forms of church ministry in the Twin Cities, I would be able to give a sample of urban ministry techniques. I observed the church and was able to visit a random church service. Through email, phone interviews and face-to-face interviews I asked questions used in which to compare very different church ministries to one another. But overall my overarching questions are these: How does the ministry relate its message to contemporary audience? Where does it focus its energy? Is it effective by its own definition? The purpose of including these churches in this paper are simply to show in real ways how churches are ministering to the present culture.

Church Ministry #1: Hosanna

We of Hosanna! invite you into a lifelong journey with Jesus Christ, which leads to a new community and a changed life.

-Hosanna! Purpose Statement

At Hosanna! they are "Christians first, Lutherans second." Hosanna is a member of Word Alone, a network of ELCA congregations desiring to stay in the ELCA, but not accepting nor practicing the historic episcopate. They own 22 acres and have a beautiful

31,000 sq.ft. building on it. Hosanna! now has an average worship attendance of 2571 per week at 5 services; 4066 baptized members (1221 households). It started January 1980 when the Pastor, Bill Bohline, went and knocked on about 1200 doors.

The truth is in fact that Hosanna! is a very modern church with elements that are postmodern as well. I realize this blending and mixing of the modern and the postmodern is a paradox in itself. How can a church be modern and yet not? How can it be flowing in a stream of change and yet be modern, it is. The reality is that none of the churches I visited had adopted a postmodern label. In fact each one claimed simply to be who they were and Hosanna! though very modern in it's structure and makeup, falls along the same lines.

Hosanna is intentional in prayer. This element of Hosanna! is a key to understanding who they are, complete with prayer chapel available during all of the services. Pat Moe the prayer director told me that it began with a small group praying at the church Saturday Nights. Not long after that the church adopted a prayer ministry that has now grown quite large. She told me that over the years they have seen miracles and healings through prayer. She clarified, in case I might have thought they had learned a new way to pray, "we just pray the word." Pat is a spokeswoman for Hosanna! and tells about the power of prayer as she now tours the state sharing the story of Hosanna! with pastors and other churches.¹⁰² The ministries that have come from the prayer ministry are numerous, listening friend, care groups, and free meals to money challenged parents are just a few examples of how Hosanna prayer affects the lives of people through service as well.

¹⁰² She will be giving a workshop at Gustavus on teaching how to start a lay based prayer ministry for a Conference of the Minneapolis Synod, June 2nd.

Hosanna is intentional in their hospitality as well. Walking among them I, though not even being Lutheran felt very much at home. Hosanna! has many programs that help people become part of the church, including a new believers class. But one of their most warm and welcoming ministries that brings people into partnership with others is the Alpha program. The Alpha course which is a meal and small group discussion on who was Christ to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Alpha course has grown from nearly 200 registered courses in 1997 to 2,500 in 2001. According to the teaching pastor at Hosanna! Alpha draws "more younger adults than older." To David, postmodern is very close to GenX. Leonard Sweet's EPIC¹⁰³ applies to this course, "it's highly interactive, hands-on approach, the people get to do stuff, not just talk about it, they can actually effect the outcome by showing up. It's not very controlling either, they can come as an atheist and leave an atheist and not feel rejected. People that go may witness anything from healings to exorcisms." Alpha course has done two things for Hosanna! it has brought in people outside the church and it has equipped them to become part of the church.

After attending Saddleback and Willow Creek they came back and threw out their board of elders and adopted a span of care model of the church taken out of Exodus 18. After coming back they decided that they did not want to make themselves a Willow Creek copy so they determined to "Hosannaize" all the things that they took from other congregations and make it their own.

Crossfire may be the most non-structured and organic thing at Hosanna! It started as a High School discussion group and then in a short amount of time experienced tremendous growth and turned into a worship service. The environment of Crossfire is

¹⁰³ Experiential, Participatory, Image-Driven, Connects Individual to Communal (EPIC)

relaxed like a coffeehouse, people sit around tables, and it's very interactive. It reaches ages 15-25. David told me they are "less monological, more dialogical." Crossfire is "the place to be" in the community. Crossfire is considered part of the worship services offered at Hosanna! David told me, "we're not controlling, anything can happen. He ended by saying, "we have no five year plans at Hosanna!"

Which brings us to the theme of Hosanna! which is experienced people to be people of transition and change. Of all the aspects of Hosanna! this element of change may be the most perplexing. For Hosanna! is firm in its doctrinal stance. The pastor's don't aim to make people feel warm and fuzzy there is an element of Hosanna! that challenges people to live the life they profess to believe. After sharing letters written to him by some of the little kids, he talked softly about faith. "A faith that has been tested is a faith that can be trusted." Almost in the same conversational manner he said, "Palm Sunday is always a day of decisions: have you made him Lord of your life, or have you crucified him with your indifference and with your silence?"¹⁰⁴ It wasn't pounding from the pulpit, Bill spoke with soft words and never raised his voice. The pastor's attributes reflected the congregation of people they were authentic and relational. All intentional in making people feel welcome.

Hosanna! music is contemporary has a very contemporary service. "We started out as a very traditional church - AMBW -liturgy," explained Janine Olson, pastor of life ministries. "When they moved into the new building the decision was made there would

¹⁰⁴ He went on to ask two questions: "Can a holy God overlook our sin?" and "Can a God who is fully loving punish us?" To that he answered, No! "He is both justice AND mercy!" The solution is the Cross. He explained, "When God so loved the world, "you are included!" Response- pity to leave a gift unopened; need to receive the gift of the cross. He ended with application- 1) Live as though you are loved. 2) Love as though there were no limits on your love.

be one service, and since there were very few people going to the traditional service. The decision was made to do all contemporary services.” Her attitude toward contemporary was not rivalry “we’re not competing with other churches, we don’t feel like we need people to stay here because God is here, that’s not what we do best. We have a contemporary service but it doesn’t mean you have to go here, God is everywhere.”

At the end of my visit and interviews I was still unable to grasp all that Hosanna! does. As I was talking to David Housholder he told me, “There’s so much, I don’t know what goes on here, I just know what goes on in my area.”

Church Ministry #2: Spirit Garage

Spirit Garage was a missionary church plant of *Bethlehem Lutheran Church*.¹⁰⁵

The leadership of Bethlehem attended a conference and was challenged: “What are you doing to reach uptown unchurched?” Chris Nelson Pastor of Bethlehem realized, “we have an obligation to share the gospel with people and if the green hymnal is doing it, we need to find a way that does.”¹⁰⁶ So they researched the needs of the Uptown community and hired Pam Fickenscher, an ordained minister, to start a new worshipping community. Looking for a band leader she found, former Gustavus graduate of Music, John Kernsey, and they started out in fall of 1997 in Comedy Sportz, a club in uptown. When they outgrew that place they moved to an Elementary school that held 800, and recently they moved to a Minneapolis Theater Garage on the corner of Franklin and Lyndale which seats about 120. Outside of the theater section, there is a medium size lobby where they

¹⁰⁵ Located at 4100 Lyndale Avenue South Minneapolis, MN

¹⁰⁶ Blezard, Rob. “*Spirit Garage*: Innovative Ministry brings the gospel to a new generation,” *The Lutheran*. June 1998, Augsburg Fortress: Minneapolis, 32

serve refreshments between the two morning services. The earlier service is typically smaller but during the second service they really have to pack them in. *Spirit Garage* attracts a variety of people, according to John Kerns,

we have users, rehab, hecklers, white-collar, modern hippie, seminary students, a couple of families, the lost and the found.¹⁰⁷

Apparently *Spirit Garage* also attracts some distant tourist youth groups.¹⁰⁸ 30-40% of the people who attend *Spirit Garage* services are 1st or 2nd time visitors and most are ages 25-35 yrs old.

Their theme at *Spirit Garage* is: "The Church with the Really Big Door." The name is interesting because it combines two things that are seemingly not connected. In the beginning they thought they wanted to create a door, a big door. And then they thought about a garage door and for music, a garage type sound. The other side of the *Spirit Garage* theme is that they are intentional in their creativity and innovation. *Spirit Garage* is a blend of innovation and tradition.

A lot of people have a sense of tradition. They hunger for tradition. So it has to be done in a way they can make it real for themselves. We are not a straight jacket.¹⁰⁹

They like to say: "*Spirit Garage* is Nondenominational and Lutheran underneath the hood." The liturgy/parts are still there, only the *how* is different. They intentionally looked for untraditional venues could reach the unchurched and the over churchd. Carl Holmquist and John Kerns explained to me, "Before we defined ourselves by who we

¹⁰⁷ Minister of Music John Kernsey and Carl Holmquist Finance Coordinator of *Spirit Garage*, interview by author, 8 April 2001, Theater Garage, Tape Recording, Theater Garage, Minneapolis

¹⁰⁸ When I was there, there was a youth group of about thirty people that came from north of Brainerd.

¹⁰⁹ Pastor Pam Fickenscher of *Spirit Garage*, phone interview by author, 25 April 2001, Bethlehem Lutheran Church, South Minneapolis

were not..." They used to compare themselves to other churches and say they are not like that church or that church. "Now we define ourselves by who we are."

We don't need to be different for difference's sake. We need to be different because hundreds, no thousands of people aren't hearing the good news of God's love by the 'traditional means.

When Pam looked for a sound for her new worshiping community she didn't want the contemporary Christian worship sound, she wanted to incorporate original and familiar music along with rock to blues to funk. She found John Kernsey and the two became good friends. Kerns, as he's called, the Minister of Music for *Spirit Garage* was raised in Big Lake, Minnesota. He graduated Gustavus after learning the trade of playing live rock & roll for local St. Peter, MN bar patrons. In the fall of 1997, John Kern's life turned around after he met Pam Fickenscher, he brought the new sound to *Spirit Garage* and he's been playing weekly gigs there with the band ever since.

Kerns was standing quietly with his wool sweater and bell bottom jean pants, to the left of the makeshift altar. Then with a straw hat pulled down, he began to sing, "How can you still love me?"¹¹⁰ As he sung, "sometimes you amaze me, sometimes your Spirit slays me," tears started to form in his eyes. Kerns told me that he isn't trying to inspire young Christian music; he's just being who he is. Kerns seemed layed back as he told me he felt more comfortable playing, with his band, in bars than playing in churches. He smiled, "We have a gritty, nastier side the secular world would be interested in hearing." They started by doing a Sunday service at the Lake Harriet Band shell.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ © 1989 LIMB Records/Lost and Found, "How Can You?"

¹¹¹ *Spirit Garage* is now 1 of the 13 churches that alternate doing services on a Sunday morning at the Lake Harriet Band shell.

Since its start the *Spirit Garage* band has become a little more melodic and relaxed in their music and worship style.

In terms of outreach *Spirit Garage* believes very strongly in giving back to the community. Carl explained that, "an effective church is one that understands its community, is real, is creative, is a 'part,' and not 'apart,' from the world, and one that is willing to take risks in the name of Christ."¹¹² As far service goes, they are involved in Habitat for Humanity, refugee services, a building project on a reservation, youth gardening with Urban Lands, Napisis Crisis Nursery, and sending a group of people on a service project to Jamaica. After sharing with me the many activities of *Spirit Garage*, Pam said to me, "For 150 people, we're doing a lot." They really are! *Spirit Garage* lives lives of charity. *Spirit Garage* gives 30% of its offering to many different places and ½ of that ends up helping the area locally.

The connection to the community is split between being involved in the things that *Spirit Garage* does whether it be service and participating in one of *Spirit Garage* many small groups. Through service new people get involved, without scared off. "They don't have to talk about spirituality." This is the part of *Spirit Garage* that recognizes that the church is not here for themselves. The community of *Spirit Garage* is a church, though it may not be in a church building and may not have the feel of the church environment, it is a church no less. It prays, it plans, and it progresses. Through the many different groups people are welcomed into an accepting, "come as you are," community. While Pam acknowledged that there was a sheet to sign for members, "membership is by participation, people may never sign the sheet but are involved. At

¹¹² Carl Holmquist, Email to author, carlholmquist@yahoo.com, 19 Apr 2001

times stewardship has grown, even when membership has not.” *Spirit Garage* seeks to be inclusive, some are involved but not really members. Yet they’re included in the *Spirit Garage* book with their pictures, they are part of the community.

The church has a loose leadership structure; part of the pressure is relieved in the fact that they are still a part of Bethlehem Lutheran church. “But it makes it nice for *Spirit Garage* to not have to take care of the administrative stuff,” Carl Holmquist informed me. “Don’t know about four years from now.” He told me that this type of ministry had become an increasing trend in the church. “Let the mission deal with mission and the church deal with tax status.”¹¹³ Oddly enough *Bethlehem Lutheran Church* treats *Spirit Garage* like another church. There are other benefits to being connected to *Bethlehem*, *Spirit Garage* frequently is able to do services at Bethlehem. It is a perfect place for small groups and to access kitchen facilities for food.

“How do you train leaders?” I asked Carl. “We’re experimenting, we don’t have all figured out. But we admit it and that resonates with the generation.” Carl informed me that *Bethlehem*,¹¹⁴ of whom he is still a member, is growing.

Pastor Pam’s messages are mostly conversational and authentic, similar to the people of *Spirit Garage*. They are very big on hospitality but they do not separate and believers and non-believers, by being ‘seek-sensitive.’ “We need to ‘be real.’ People see through the veil of things. ‘All smiles’ is phony; it’s fake. People don’t need that,” Kerns told me. “Many understand faith to be a journey,” Pam told me, “I try to weave together the Biblical Story and stories everyone in the community knows (whether it be

¹¹³ Carl suggested for anyone thinking of starting a new church, “we recommend that you find a strong congregation in the community and make sure they understand their role. Their role is not to run the them. Their role is help and empower them and also to shield them from all the other stuff.” We have thirty people, and because of Bethlehem we don’t have to worry about a constitution and tax status and all that.”

¹¹⁴ Saddleback Community Church awarded Bethlehem 1999 Purpose-Driven Church Health Award.

movies, music, or a slice of life)." She tends to focus more on the spiritual challenges of this life than the rewards of heaven. It's very casual and down to earth; Pam doesn't use notes. Drama's are not uncommon and open communion is offered in every service to whoever wills which reinforces the acceptance in the community.

Church Ministry #3: House of Mercy

"It all began in Russell's kitchen in St. Paul, Minnesota on a bitter cold Saturday morning in February of 1996. Debbie, Mark, and Russell—frustrated by contemporary Christian popular culture and saddened that so many of their old friends apparently wanted nothing to do with the Jesus story—asked each other: 'What if we started our own church, what would it look like?'"

That's how they begin to tell their story. On the other side, First Baptist was a struggling church, after 150 years of ministry, located in the downtown St. Paul, it needed a breath of new life. When the pastors went to the pastors of First Baptist, with their new church idea, they heard, to their delight,¹¹⁵ "We totally want you to do it here!" And so they did, they founded House of Mercy in the spring of 1996. House of mercy began meeting in the First Baptist church every Sunday Night. They were off to a good start, they had a central place to meet and best of all First Baptist didn't charge rent.

Pastor Debbie Blue explained, "We went back and said, 'let's really think of some of the traditions that have been around.' We reached back into the rich tradition. We figured we'd never be on the cutting edge. The church will never be on the cutting edge

¹¹⁵ They had wanted to have their service in a beautiful old church

of technology it just moves to fast.”¹¹⁶ What is eclecticism? *House of Mercy* is committed to the diverse and rich theology and worship of the Christian church worldwide and historical. In this balance of high and low church, they seek to “draw on elements from many different Christian traditions (Lutheran, Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox, and the free churches) Russell Rathbun, points out the importance it is to have sacred space. It’s what people are looking for. They smell the incense and it creates a different environment.”¹¹⁷ They are affiliated with the American Baptist Churches of America that does not recognize political sovereignty over their congregations; this is part of the free church tradition.

The music was very important to the pastors, some having been involved in a band themselves. They considered “Contemporary Christian music too hokey. And praise songs and choruses, too individualistic and triumphal—with bad poetry to boot.”¹¹⁸ However they really enjoyed High Liturgy Church hymnody was great. But in a post-Christian era how would that work out? Their solution came in the form of Chris Larson. The sound that emerged is what one might call country bluegrass hymns. You have to hear it to believe it. During the service I saw a ukulele, guitar, bass guitar, electric guitar, accordion and drums. “It’s not people just get used it and then they like it, it’s that they understand it.”¹¹⁹ Chris Larson tried to explain to me. When I was there I didn’t enjoy the music but as I listened to his CD after I went it became increasing clear I had pre-

¹¹⁶ Pastor Debbie Blue of *House of Mercy*, Interview by author, 8 April 2001, First Baptist Church, Downtown St. Paul

¹¹⁷ Morphew, “Bringing God to Generation X,” *Pioneer Press*, Nov 1, 1998

¹¹⁸ Part of Information collected off the website, <http://www.houseofmercy.org/about/startabout.html>

¹¹⁹ Music Leader Chris Larson of *House of Mercy*, Interview by author, 8 April 2001, First Baptist Church, Downtown St. Paul

judged it and not understood it. This is at the heart of House of Mercy worship, tradition that doesn't need to be gotten used to, it needs merely to be understood.

House of Mercy offers a blend of high and low church, of tradition and innovation, sincere worship and healthy skepticism. Their vision became "to build a church through the recovery of grace-based theology, the practice of liturgical eclecticism, and active service in the world.

They are very intentional in their community. What does that look like?

Community Guilds and common interest Guilds. Guild is taken out of a 12th century context, which refers to a group that sought to unite for the common good of the community. In the community guilds are all about acting out the drama of God's love in face-to-face relationships. By telling one another our stories, we learn something about the story of us an. As we break bread, study, and learn together our purpose is especially and always to discover, together, how to "be the Church". -We do this by offering one another support, discipleship, encouragement, and accountability in an ever-growing circle of Clod's people, when the circle grows to approximately ten people, the guild "multiplies," forming two guilds, and the process begins again." House of Mercy Jr (a shame-free youngster program), Artbus, book clubs with everything from Annie Dillard to Ulrich Zwingli, DIY Arts Workshops, love feasts (a community meal featuring good and exotic food, including Tanzanian, Brazilian, Thai, Cuban, and Mediterranean), Bible studies where there is no sacrifice-of-the- intellect, but honest interpretation of the Bible. There are also readings by Karl Barth, Douglas Coupland, Annie Dillard, Michael Foucault, Thomas Frank, Soren Kierkegaard, Juliane of Norwich, and Flannery O'Connor. Stations of the Cross occurs lent through Easter show in which local artists are commissioned to interpret the 14 stations of Jesus' journey to the cross.

And what's more they have guest artists com in and play and then there is even Gospel Song Tribune an annual fall tribute in which local bands and singers salute great american gospel songwriters. Past tributes include Hank Williams (1998) and the Louvin Brothers (1999).¹²⁰

House of Mercy is trying to reach the 'Cynical Christians' and the 'spiritually curious.' Russell explained to me that before they are over churchd they come to understand the Good News of Jesus' gospel as bad news and so they turn away from the gospel. "If it's up to us that's Bad News." While the pastors all love Karl Barth, they are in no way a Barthian Church. In his message Russell asks,

"How can I follow Jesus on the way?"

His answer is full of compassion and grace, "I can't, I won't, I don't."¹²¹ The messages, according to Russell, are more about the question than the answer. He sees it that if we can answer the questions about God and we can figure God out after a few months, what are we going to do? Have to get a new God.

Service is very important as one of the pillars of the mission statement. *House of Mercy* is often involved in Habitat for Humanity, Service and Reconciliation work groups with Call to Renewal.

House of Mercy invites a large artistic community. In the basement of First Baptist are a number of confessional booths that people have made. Some weren't necessarily Christian, but all were given the opportunity to express their creativity. Each confessional was unique and was crafted by the hands of someone who could create what

¹²⁰ more information taken from the website, <http://www.houseofmercy.org/about/startabout.html>

¹²¹ "There are others who will take my place. I fail and they will suffer for me. God's purpose will be fulfilled. I need to come outside of myself and learn from others." He concludes.

they felt. Some of the confessional booths had a otherworldly feel. This acceptance and openness not only to artistic expression but to ideas as well is probably why *House of Mercy* draws a large Bethel crowd as well as many other artists.

I realized as I left, House of Mercy has many faces and to visit only once one might get the impression that House of Mercy is a Sunday Night thing. It's not, there is much more to see.

Reflection of the Case Studies

As a result of looking at my case studies I was able to see the theory that I had developed at work in a practical way. It is interesting to recognize that of all the churches I visited, no church was completely immersed in a postmodern mindset. This is the paradox sometimes at work in this contemporary world, where church is able to take on elements of modern and postmodern values. The churches each emphasized an inviting community, relational authenticity, willingness to explore, and gave their members an experience. These were perhaps of the most striking examples of what made these ministries who they were. Each claimed to be who they were. Of all the elements that made these churches affective, these stuck out. They each:

1. Inviting Community. Each ministry made conscious efforts to be open to new people. The talks at *Spirit Garage* were conversational and they assumed that their audience knew very little about the faith. At *House of Mercy* they were intentional about their inclusiveness of their community. They put everyone on the same level as everyone else. *Spirit Garage* also saw that building community could be through service and that in that context people would be more willing to help out.
2. Relational Authenticity. They were all real people. Hosanna! was warm and friendly. They smiled and truly appreciated the people who came. *Spirit Garage* was true to themselves, and lived in the midst of difficulties and struggles. *House of Mercy* was honest, and never claimed to have it all figured out. These ministries were

very alike. I suspect that in the scope of the contemporary need, each is effective in reaching their audience.

3. Openness to Exploration. *Hosanna!* has been called a changing church. While it remains extremely faithful to its doctrine the shape of the ministry freely bends and molds itself. *Spirit Garage* took risks. They took a risk in starting a church, they continue to take risks as they try new things. *House of Mercy* continues to boldly invite people to express their interpretations of God through the Art Bus or the art gallery.
4. Offered an Experience. At *Spirit Garage* there was a focal point. Each service Pam would light a candle. The people that went not only enjoyed the music, but they found it to be their home. *House of Mercy* burned incense and dimmed the lights while the country bluegrass gospel hymns were sung. Even *Hosanna!* promised an experience with God, "a special touch," through prayer ministers and through the service. It seen in all three ministries in their location, in their music, in their programs. It wasn't just a thing they did it was innovative, it was creative, it was an experience.

The point of including the case studies was to show in real ways how ministries could reach a contemporary people. There are so many issues that I could discuss. But I believe that I have presented a sampling of the many issues the contemporary churches need to address as the emerging church begins to take shape.

Conclusion: “So What?”

Answering the Question

I set out in the start of this paper to determine the answer to this question: “what are the ways that church ministries are attempting to reach contemporary culture?” I reasoned that the best way to answer the question, was to examine the culture and recognize the contemporary need in culture. By examining how the culture had been affected by modern and postmodern ideas, I then was able to give the theory shape by seeing how it affected the church in the context of the modern world, which is what I have meant by the term the “modern church.”

So we went on a journey by following certain developments of the modern mindset and how they affected certain parts of the church. I attempted to draw out observations and analysis that would hopefully describe the modern influenced church,¹²² in a better attempt to describe what the church will look like in the future? I tried to paint in broad strokes what parts I thought had been influences of modernism on the church. Then I attempted once again to show the reaction against modern mindset of ideas. I did this intentionally to set it in opposition against the breakdown I had described of modernism and the ways in which I believed adequately described the emerging church.

However after all the theory and predictions I moved into an arena of practical application of what I had drawn out of modern and postmodern influences. By including the case studies I tried to show in real ways what ministries were doing to reach people in this culture and show how some of the theory might look when put into practice.

¹²² I reiterate: I don’t think that anyone can dogmatically say that the church is/was ever completely modern because 1) the phrase “church” is a generalization and 2) the churches were influenced in many ways by specific elements of modernism, hence the contemporary church has elements of both modern and postmodern.

I would have liked to spend more time developing what the cultural shift looks like without the theory behind it, but I found that the theory strongly influenced the cultural ideas more than I could realized.¹²³

Opportunities For Ministry

Many are noticing that the rules have changed after this last paradigm shift. One response for Christians may be to recoil and begin the slow process of fighting every line of argument to prove that postmodernism is incompatible with Christianity. However, before going to do that one should at least recognize that because of this paradigm shift many opportunities have opened up themselves:

- 1) People have been brought to a place where the Christian story is literally untold. It means that people are open to the message of Christianity in this pre-Christendom world then they ever were in the post-Christendom world.
- 2) The doors of Spirituality have been swung open as more and more of the postmodern influenced generations are more desiring Spirituality to bring wholeness to their lives.
- 3) One should not miss the fact that in this emerging world people are more and more dependent on their experience than their mind. This means that people are looking for the truest experiences in life. It means that many are looking for the most fulfilling and authentic relationships out there as they attempt to live life.
- 4) Because the world is seen with such uncertainty, people are more open to other possibilities of faith. They are willing to explore and journey into the unknown.

¹²³ This was one of the most surprising discoveries of my research. The postmodern theory influenced the cultural movement of non-linear, organic, experiential, etc... (see more in Appendix E) so much that I am convinced a good argument could be made to say that the cultural postmodern world that many pro-cultural engagement authors are writing about, has its roots in a lot of the theory that I have gone through.

This may seem to startle some. How could a cultural shift that largely destroys the notion of comprehending objective truth create conditions for a pre-Christian society where the Christian faith is explored as something new. This presents the church with great opportunities for ministry even if it rejects some of the basic postmodern influences. In my mind the challenge for the church once it has understood the culture, is to embrace the people.¹²⁴

This return to authentic relationships and authentic embodiment is a return to the beginning of the Book of Acts. People may say that Institutions are suspect¹²⁵ but in this increasingly postmodern context people are tapping into their social tendencies and moving towards a more relational way of living. The answer to the problem of gnawing pessimism and lack of hope is found in community of people. What kind of community? A community that is aware of the needs of the larger community, that is visible, that is beneficial to people, a community that empowers its members and does not control them and a community that reflects the light of God to people in ways that they can see.

The Greatest Challenge

The greatest challenge for the emerging churches, operating in a postmodern context, is to pursue the praises of God to the praises of people. Because the potential to create an image, that is attractive to people,¹²⁶ is so great, there is a strong temptation to make ministry or the presentation into an idol where all the time one has is consumed in trying to build the right image. Ultimately the churches that will be the most glorifying

¹²⁴ This is a difficult subjection that I wish I could write more in depth about. What has happened is that the line between the person's identity and what the person does has been lost so that for a Christian to reject or be against what someone does, is a rejection of that person. The old adage in practice, "hate the sin" is so offensive and so destructive that the message "love the sinner" is virtually not heard.

¹²⁵ Beaudoin, 51-72, devotes a whole chapter to describing why that might be

¹²⁶ An image of acceptance, of love, and true community.

to God in the future are the one's that pursue to be conformed to the image of God rather than the right paradigm.

Churches trying to do postmodernism... are missing the point... [the problem] cannot be solved simply by pursuing a postmodern paradigm... You can follow all the tactics, methods, and models, but if it does not connect people with the reality of God, forget it.¹²⁷

The reality of God is not something that can be marketed and it is not something that people can create. While the postmodern elements of experience may draw the person to a service that uses incense and candles, that is not the end, it may be a means to openness.¹²⁸ If the medium does not draw people to the reality of the holiness and beauty of God, then it is a human creation, and not of God.

Finally we must see God at work even as these shifts are occurring. "From whom, to whom, and through whom are all things."¹²⁹ We need to see that God is working to reconcile people to each other and to God. God is working in the shifts to bring forth glory and honor to God's name.

¹²⁷ Hopkins, David "The Deception of the 'X-treme' Church," Next-Wave, Oct. 1999

¹²⁸ Another example of the medium becoming a more powerful apologetic than the message.

¹²⁹ Romans 11: 36 NIV

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Moe, Pat, Director, Care and Prayer Ministry at *Hosanna!*, 2001, Phone Interview by author, 23 April, *Hosanna!*, Lakeville, MN

Rathbun, Russell, Minister of *House of Mercy*, 2001, Interview by author, 8 April, First Baptist, tape recording, Downtown St. Paul

Church Ministry Information:

Hosanna! 22yrs old, member of Evangelical Lutheran Church America

Services: Sat. at 4:30pm and 6:00 p.m. AND Sun. 8:17am, 9:30am, and 11:00 am.

9600 163rd Street West, Lakeville, Minnesota 55044

Phone: 952-435-3332

<http://www.hosannalc.org/>

Spirit Garage, 3yrs old, Alternative Church plant of Bethlehem Lutheran Church

Worship Gatherings: Sundays 9:00 and 11:00am

Minneapolis Theater Garage

711 W. Franklin Avenue & South Lyndale Ave, Minneapolis, MN, 55405

Phone: 612-827-1074

<http://www.spiritgarage.org/>

Bethlehem Lutheran Church

Services Sunday: 7:45, 8:45, 9:45 & 11:05 am

4100 Lyndale Avenue South Minneapolis, MN 55409

phone: 612-312-3400

<http://www.bethlehem-church.org/>

House of Mercy, 5yrs old, American Baptist Churches

Services Sunday 5:30pm, Wednesday - Compline Service 9:30pm

First Baptist Church

499 Wacounta St., St. Paul, Minnesota, 55101

phone: (651) 298-0853

<http://www.houseofmercy.org/>

Appendix A

The responses of churches to cultural shifts have been many. Jimmy Long in his book Generating Hope summarizes what he believes have been five of the major positions of churches in regard to the culture in America:¹³⁰

- (1) The Assimilating Church: In the world and of the world.
 - Must become like the culture to win the culture (1 Cor.9:20)
 - Reasons that if the culture recognizes itself in the people, it will more open to hear what the people of the church have to say.
 - Church often gets assimilated by culture
 - Liberals often become assimilated into inclusivity and tolerance
 - Conservative often become assimilated into American civil religion
- (2) The Protecting Church: Not of the world and not in the world.
 - Look around see only moral corruption and decay
 - They build walls (church is good) to keep the world (evil and change) out.
 - Privatized and protected Christian bookstores, schools, colleges, media
 - With a bunker mentality they establish protected communities
 - Includes Monastic tradition
- (3) The Unchanging Church: Not in the world and oblivious to the world.
 - Church ignores culture
 - Praise their traditions and equate their own traditions with God's blessing
 - Found primarily in independent, rural fundamentalist churches
 - Includes some Anabaptist, Mennonite, Amish and Quaker Communities, along with some parts of the Catholic Church.
- (4) The Battling Church: In the world and over the world.
 - See it as the good guys (historical Christian America) vs. the bad guys (the atheistic secular humanists)
 - America is seen as the New Israel; people need to take America for God.
 - The method of producing change is by political means; the Christian Right shares this in common with Liberation Theology.
 - Us-versus-them mentality; war mentality of Church against Culture
 - Their claim to speak for all Christians is arrogant
- (5) The Influencing Church: In the world but not of the world.
 - See culture as a mission field rather than a war zone
 - Sees itself as involved and befriending individuals in culture
 - "Havens of hospitality," not military bunkers.
 - Open lines of dialogue, instead of drawing battle lines
 - See people as created by God and in need of God, not as enemies of God

¹³⁰ Long, Chapter 1, 20-33

Appendix B

I chose a case study approach over a generational approach for a several reasons. First, I think that the labels and characterizations shouldn't include a whole generation of people. I am certain on the other hand that while describing the contemporary era I will most likely run into the fact that various generations have been immersed and affected by these ideas for longer than others. In doing this I will not have to draw out differences in the generations, but will be able to convey that postmodern thinking has impacted certain age groups in a definite way. Second, I think that the question, "what does it look like?" would only be answered in the theoretical. The descriptive and comparative fieldwork approach is a more visible way to see much of the theoretical ideas and models applicable to what can be done in the church now. Third, the generational approach has been abused by the media and by the marketers. Many seem convinced the defining an entire Generation is the way to go, but I fear that the reaction to the label may be more than anyone can handle. What will it take for people to realize their is no way to take a whole generation of people and explain how they all behave. Yes, that they have been influenced by cultural currents is a given, but to say that an entire generation¹³¹ can be summed up in a few short phrases is presumptuous.

Douglas Coupland, the man who originally wrote Generation X that started this whole thing, wrote an article that described the abuse of this label. He explained the origin of the name from a chapter of book he read. He then proceeded to explain how it became a cultural phenomenon. In his article he confronts the label of X:

And now I'm here to say that X is over. I'd like to declare a moratorium on all the noise, because the notion that there now exists a different generation - X, Y, K, whatever - is no longer debatable... marketers and journalists never understood that X is a term that defines not a chronological age but a way of looking at the world.¹³²

¹³¹ For a good examination and breakdown of the characteristics of an Xer, reviewed by an Xer, see <http://www.youth.co.za/genxthesis/ch3.htm>

¹³² Coupland, "Douglas Coupland Commits Gen-X-cide," Details, June 1995, p.72 (see also <http://www.youth.co.za/xpaper2011.htm>)

Appendix C

Post-Christian? Details (the December 1995 issue).¹³³

Here's a quick roll call of ads and articles that had anything to do with spirituality:

- A one-third page ad for the new album by P.M. Dawn called "Jesus Wept" (85).
- A full-page report on some new "street translations" of the Bible, as written for African-American teenagers, called Rappin' with Jesus: The Good News According to the Four Brothers (57).
- An interview with Mary Tyler Moore, where she tells of her experience as Elvis' last leading lady--she played a nun in "Change of Habit." In the last scene, Elvis is playing guitar in a musical Mass, while Mary's character prays and looks from the statue of Jesus to Elvis and from Jesus to Elvis again.
- Diesel Jeans and Workwear has a two-page ad that tells a Christmas story of depression, #48 in a series of Diesel "How to ... Guides to Successful Living for People Interested in General Health and Mental Power" (20-21).
- Another ad for jeans ("Jean Splicing") shows a model with a velvet Madonna (the mother of Jesus) T-shirt (169).
- Another ad for men's evening wear is entitled "From Dusk to Dawn" and it features a wool jacket fashioned to look like a clerical collar: "The new evening clothes walk the line between preacher man and night stalker" (141).
- The Rolling Stones' Keith Richards is asked whether he read any of Marianne Faithful's books, and he admits he has, while paying her the highest compliment for her singing: "Her voice was like it had come out of church" (184).
- Full-page ad for the CD-ROM game, HEXEN, which advertises itself in this way: "Whatever god it is that you pray to, start asking for a quick and painless execution" (191).
- A review of minister/gospel singer Al Green's new album "Your Heart's in Good Hands" (193).
- The musical group, Intro is announcing its new album "New Life," along with a game whereby you can "Win yourself 'New Life' and a new stereo" (105).

¹³³ "Was Jesus a Buster?" *Homiletics Online*, Communication Resources, Inc. September 29, 1996
<http://www.homileticsonline.com/Installments/sep2996.htm>

Appendix D

Bill Hybels, pastor of Willow Creek (mega-church), in one of his books in a chapter called “Unstereotyping Evangelism,” discusses three facets of authentic evangelism: motivation, mindset, and style.¹³⁴

The **motivations** for personal evangelism are:

1. What Hybel’s called “the stockpile factor,” 120 – 2 Kings 6-7 Lepers and the Famine – this is so good we have to share (guilt and gladness)
2. An agent of God, 122 – witness on a mission to tell the world
3. Eternity, 122 – knowledge that people may spend eternity in hell
4. Being a part of heaven’s celebration. 123 –Joy of leading someone to Christ and the Angels rejoice.

The **mindset** for personal evangelism is:

Preoccupied with people- “What’s Jesus message? That lost, wayward, rebellious, cursing people matter to God so much that He wants us to go after them.” (125)

“Authentic evangelism flows from a mindset that acknowledges the ultimate value of people – forgotten people, lost people, wandering people, up-and-outers, down-and-outers, - all people. The highest value is to love them, serve them, and reach them.”

(125) “Few people are asked to abandon their nets and abandon their professions. The majority of Jesus followers are simply asked to develop a new mindset.” (124)

The six possible **styles** of personal evangelism (126)

1. Confrontational – Peter Pentecost – “you crucified the wrong man!” (126-127)
2. Intellectual – Paul on Mars Hill – Josh McDowell Apologetics (128)
3. Testimonial – Man born blind (dramatic change) (129-130)
4. Relational – Mark 5 demoniac shares faith with those he’s close to (130)
5. Invitational - Samaritan woman in adultery, “come hear!” (131)
6. Serving – Acts 9 – Dorcas served people (132)

¹³⁴ Hybels, 119-133

Appendix E

Here is a break down, which is no way complete, of modern and emerging *after* modern values from the myriad of books I have read¹³⁵ and sources I have consulted.

Modern Value

Exclusive
Egocentric
Individualistic
Function
Industrial
Local
Compartmentalized
Relevant
Linear
Mechanical
Formulistic
Static
Hierarchical
Positional Authority
Dictatorial
Perfect
Aspiring
Individual
Supervisory
Controlling
Individual ownership
Dualistic
Material
Traditional
Informational
Word-driven
Objective
Conventional
Uniform
Product-oriented

Emerging Cultural Value

Relative
Altruistic
Communal
Creative
Environmental
Global
Holistic
Authentic, Relational
Non-linear, web
Organic
Free flowing/fluid
Changing/transforming
Mutual authority, networking
Earned, Relational Authority
Participatory
Wounded Healer
Inspiring
Team
Mentoring
Empowering
corporate ownership, partnership
Holistic
Spiritual
Non-traditional, contemporary, alternative
Experiential, Relational
Image-driven, storytelling
Subjective, relative
Innovative, new, experimental, exploratory
Diverse
Process-oriented

¹³⁵ Jones, Webber, McCullum, and Sweet

Appendix F

Erickson lists characteristics of post-conservative theology in his book *Evangelical*

Left.¹³⁶ Here's a checklist for your personal evaluation. Post-conservatives are characterized by:

- Eagerness to engage in dialogue with non-evangelical theologians. Indeed, "they seek opportunities to converse with those whom conservative evangelicals would probably consider enemies." In particular Erickson refers to liberal and catholic theologians.
- Concern with theology's domination by white males and Euro-centrism. Recognizing the influence of social location on theological work, post-conservatives seek to include women, persons of color, and Third World Christians in theological scholarship.
- Broadening of the sources used in theology. This frequently includes an emphasis on "narrative-shaped experience" rather than "propositional truths enshrined in doctrines." The sources may include, in addition to the Bible, Christian tradition, culture, and contemporary Christian experience.
- A discontent with the traditional ties of evangelical theology to the "evangelical Enlightenment," especially common sense realism.
- Rejection of the "wooden" approach to Scripture, in favor of regarding it as "Spirit-inspired realistic narrative."
- An open view of God, in which God limits himself and enters into relationships of genuine response to humans, taking their pain and suffering into himself. God is a risk-taker, not one who controls everything so that nothing contrary to his desires can occur.
- An acceptance, rather than a rejection, of the realm of nature. Nature, although fallen, is never abandoned by grace, which then pervades it.
- A hope for a near-universal salvation. God has not left himself without a witness in all cultures, sufficient to bring people to salvation if they earnestly seek it.
- An emphasis in Christology on the humanity of Jesus. While retaining belief in the divinity of Christ, this is thought of more in relational than in substance and person categories.
- A more synergistic understanding of salvation. These theologians are, overall, more Arminian than Calvinistic.
- A rejection of triumphalism with respect to theological truth-claims. Post-conservatives are critical of belief in epistemological certainty and theological systems.

¹³⁶ Erickson, 29-30

Appendix G

The award winning NBC TV show, *Third Rock From the Sun*, which premiered January 9th 1996, is a great example of what the person in the culture can relate to. The show is about four aliens that assume the human form and names in order to study Earth.¹³⁷ They know absolutely nothing about being human including that there are differences between male and female sexes. They learn much of what they know about Earth by interacting with the people around them and sampling popular culture.¹³⁸ They are postmodern: Emphasize the search over the attainment of knowledge, they are high experience, they reinforce Community and the uniqueness of the Individual.

The characters start by admitting they don't understand the world. Yet they are not nihilistic like NBC's original *Seinfeld* that claimed to be "a show about nothing." In 3rd Rock there is a purpose and that purpose is to seek. But as the episodes progress they seem more about the questions than the answer.¹³⁹ The answers are frequently offered as their observations. One might argue that their answers are pragmatic; based on what works.

Because they are aliens in human bodies, they are very big on new experiences. They enjoy their exploration, seeking, making new discoveries. In the first few episodes

¹³⁷ They need to blend in, so they take on human forms and identities. The high commander of the mission, Dick (John Lithgow), gets a job as a professor at a university and meets the love of his life, Dr. Mary Albright (Jane Curtin). The other crewmembers take on various forms. Sally, the mission's first officer who is in charge of security, becomes a woman after losing a coin toss. Tommy, who is the intelligence officer and is actually the oldest crewmember, becomes a teenage boy, hormones and all. And then there's Harry who is the odd ball of the group and doesn't seem to have a purpose on the mission other than communication with the home base. They all bring new perspectives to what life on Earth is like.

¹³⁸ Strachan, Alex, "3rd Rock from the Sun offers insight into 3rd rock from the sun," *The Vancouver Sun*, April 23, 1996, ENTERTAINMENT; TELEVISION; Pg. B6, Copyright 1996 Pacific Press Ltd.

¹³⁹ Roush, Matt, "'3rd Rock' lobs stones at our racial divides," *USA TODAY*, April 23, 1996, Tuesday, LIFE; Pg. 3D, Copyright 1996 Gannett Company, Inc.

they seemed obsessed with their bodies. In one episode they experienced sneezing as a pleasurable experience. The aliens often offer new perspectives, not based on what others have said, as they continue to form their perspective by interacting.

As the show progresses and they are experiencing new things they are continually creating their identity. There is also a strong emphasis of community while they have involvement with the world. Every once in a while they sit on the roof of their house together as a family and reflect on what they've learned in the world.

While living out their lives they each engage in different experiences. This gives each of them a sense of individualism not of self-centered modern individualism, but of uniqueness. While they seek to understand humans, they also seek to understand why they do what they do and how they can change. They are not hindered by the discriminatory attitudes of racism, claiming humans are like.¹⁴⁰ Yet they are, at the same time, able to accept that they are unique in the world.

¹⁴⁰ Roush, Matt, "'3rd Rock' lobs stones at our racial divides," *USA TODAY*, April 23, 1996, Tuesday, LIFE; Pg. 3D, Copyright 1996 Gannett Company, Inc.

Appendix H

Recently the Incarnation has become popular when trying to communicate with people who are post-rationalism of the Bible. The implication this has for ministry is that to order to follow Jesus the Incarnational theology needs to be applied

1) Embodiment of Love

The command to love is repeated over fifty times in the New Testament. Love must be the underlying motive of all incarnational ministry. 1 Corinthians 13 is a model of the ministry Jesus had on earth, and it is our model as well. Specifically, "it always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. Love never fails" (1 Cor. 13:7-8).

This does not mean that we condone everything that a person might do (cf. 1 Cor. 13:6). Jesus, again was our model. He practiced "accepting without approving."¹⁴¹ in the examples of his meeting with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-30), His acceptance of and banqueting with Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), and his wonderful restoration of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11). Notice that he always urged them to "go and sin no more" (John 8:11), but always did so from a context of love and acceptance of the intrinsic worth of the person.

2) Unconditional Friendship

Jesus was a "friend of sinners." In the *Ragamuffin Gospel*, Brennan Manning writes,

"Jesus spent a disproportionate amount of time with people described in the gospels as: the poor, the blind, the lame, the lepers, the hungry, sinners, prostitutes, tax collectors, the persecuted, the downtrodden, the captives, those processed by unclean spirits, all who labor and are heavy burdened, the rabble

¹⁴¹ Warren, 216

who know nothing of the law, the crowds, the little ones, the least, the last, the lost sheep of the house of Israel. In short Jesus hung out with ragamuffins."¹⁴²

As we see Jesus interacting with people, he didn't use every social occasion to attempt to evangelize people, sometimes he just told them stories and they walked away not knowing. Instead, he concentrated on building relationships.

This friendship is very different than the Christian conditions that people have long put on unbelievers, Kevin Ford relating from his experience explains, that

friendship isn't based on whether or not they respond to our gospel.... My Christian faith doesn't get in the way of our friendship, and I think the reason it doesn't is that [they] know that our friendship is real and human - not programmed or scripted to produce a certain result.¹⁴³

This will be hard at times in two different ways. The first is it will be hard because as Americans people look for instant results and this has translated to our Christianity. Second, to see people refuse to accept Christ in their lives but we must remember that Jesus knows the same feeling. When the rich young ruler came to him and rejected what Jesus told him, "Jesus looked on him and loved him," yet let him go away (Mark 10:16-22).

3) Holy Worldliness (in but not of)

Theologian John Stott emphasizes the fact that although Jesus came into the world, and experienced our temptations, He did so "without sin" (Heb. 4:15). He refers to it as "holy Worldliness:"

On the one hand, [Jesus] came to us in our world, and assumed the full reality of our humanness.... He fraternized with the common people and they flocked around him eagerly.... He identified himself with our sorrows, our sins and our death. On the other hand, in mixing freely with people like us, he never sacrificed, or

¹⁴² Manning, 49

¹⁴³ Ford, 256

even for one moment compromised, his own unique identity. His was the perfection of 'holy worldliness' And now he sends us out into the world as he was sent into the world (John 17:18; 20:21). We have to penetrate other people's worlds, as he penetrated ours - the world of their thinking (as we struggle to understand their misunderstandings of the gospel), the world of their feeling (as we try to empathize with their pain), and the world of their living (as we sense the humiliation of their social situation...).¹⁴⁴

4) Willingness to Enter Suffering

As ministry becomes more innovative and improves its technique there will be a part of it that must come back to the basics that the true Christian life involves carrying our own crosses and suffering for God. Incarnational ministry follows in the footsteps of Jesus:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! Philippians 2:5-8

Stott explains that hidden in non-Christians and Christians there are hidden depths of pain deep beneath the surface. "We can reach them only if we are willing to enter into their suffering"¹⁴⁵ Incarnational ministry suffers with and comforts others by suffering themselves just as Jesus did.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Hebrews 4:15

The help that we offer will be out of weakness and our own experience, not just our knowledge. The key for Incarnational ministers will be not who has the most degrees but who has experienced the recesses of life. It will be more based on who is able to walk through shared experiences, not just talk others through them.

¹⁴⁴ Stott, 1992, 244

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 360