

1-1-2012

# Saturday leadership: submitted, engaged leadership for the exilic and templeless church

Henry Berg  
*George Fox University*

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

SATURDAY LEADERSHIP: SUBMITTED, ENGAGED LEADERSHIP

FOR THE EXILIC AND TEMPLELESS CHURCH

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX

EVANGELICAL SEMINARY IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

HENRY BERG

PORTLAND, OREGON

MARCH, 2012

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International Version (NIV)

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George Fox Evangelical Seminary  
George Fox University  
Newberg, Oregon

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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D.Min. Dissertation

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This is to certify that the D.Min. Dissertation of

HENRY BERG

has been approved by  
the Dissertation Committee on March 13, 2012  
as fully adequate in scope and quality as a dissertation  
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership in the Emerging Culture

Dissertation Committee:

Primary Advisor: Scott Peterson

Secondary Advisor: R. Larry Shelton, Ph.D.

Tertiary Advisor: Leonard I. Sweet, Ph.D.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iv
ABSTRACT .....	vi
Chapter	
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
2 THE LATE MODERN CHURCH IN EXILE .....	8
3 THE EXILIC AND TEMPLE-LESS EXPERIENCE OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL.....	23
4 TRANSITION: FROM BABYLONIAN EXILE TO THE EARLY CHURCH .....	63
5 RE-IMAGINING THE CHURCH AS EXILIC, TEMPLE-LESS, AND MISSIONAL .....	78
6 SATURDAY LEADERSHIP: SUBMITTED AND ENGAGED EXILIC LEADERSHIP.....	119
7 CONCLUSION .....	141
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	144

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The development and writing of this dissertation has taken several years but the seeds of the thoughts integrated into this work were planted and nurtured many years earlier. I wish to thank Dr. Joyce Bellous who initially provided me a format to read and study about leadership in the local church. She encouraged my direction and supported my application to George Fox Evangelical Seminary.

I express my deep gratitude to Dr. Leonard Sweet and Dr. Chuck Conniry for their extraordinary vision for the doctoral program I have been part of and for Dr. Sweet's guidance and nurturing of the students seeking to be followers of Jesus in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century postmodern context. There have been so many nuggets of wisdom I have received from Dr. Sweet over the past several years.

Dr. Mark Boda, a highly-regarded Old Testament scholar, kindly agreed to supervise a reading course for me on the biblical exile. His wisdom, insight, guidance and the depth of his knowledge concerning the exilic period, including numerous suggestions for research, have been invaluable to me.

I am indebted to Dr. Scott Peterson, my primary advisor, who has journeyed with me throughout this doctoral program, reading the several papers submitted and offering gentle and constructive critique together with thoughtful encouragement. Dr. Larry Shelton kindly agreed to act as my second advisor and I appreciate the thoughts he shared, especially concerning covenant renewal for the Saturday church. And I express my deep appreciation to Dr. Ken Ross who read my dissertation and provided many helpful editing suggestions.

I want to thank my several friends at The London Coffee House Program. You have taught me so much about faith, spirituality, humility, love, support, and gratitude. You have showed me the face of Jesus.

Almost ten years ago, I invited two godly men to come alongside as mentors to me as we gather for breakfast each Thursday morning. It has been an enormous gift to have the support, friendship, encouragement and prayers of Bob Kline and Jerry McLarty. Thank you.

Finally, I want to especially thank my wife Kathy who has journeyed with me these many years as I juggled the practice of law, outside activities and theological studies. She has put up with having the dining room table covered with books and papers. And she has gently encouraged me to keep going and to not give up in the writing of this dissertation.

## ABSTRACT

*Saturday leadership...to embrace a place of exile from mainstream society, yet remaining fully engaged and participating in all aspects of community life while also set apart, holy, eschewing the temples of this world, submitted to following Jesus in carrying forward his ministry of hope and restoration to the world.*

From the theology of Holy Saturday

Over the last thirty years there has been great concern that the church is in decline throughout the Western world. This decline is manifested in a number of ways. Many congregations have experienced an aging membership and the loss of families and young adults. Finances were impacted and churches have closed their doors. The traditional Sunday worship experience now competes with a myriad of other more attractive ways of spending one's time. And, there is a growing sense that, for a significant portion of society, belonging to a local church has lost its relevance. Christianity is under attack, and is known more for its fundamentalist distinctive and, sadly, by what it opposes. As a result, the church has lost its role as a shaper of culture. It is no longer seen to provide a positive influence for personal morality and lifestyle. In the past the church was a leader in the public sphere. However, the church has lost its voice in the halls of political power. It has a diminished role in the development of new legislation and in the decisions promulgated from the courts of law. The voice of the Christian faith has, to a large extent, faded from public dialogue. The transition from the modern era to a postmodern period has been cited as one of the key influences in these changes. As part of this transition the enormous influence of Christendom is declining.

In response to this wane of influence many books and articles have been written, and studies undertaken, attempting to understand the reason for this decline. Many churches responded by changing their style of worship and approaches to ministry. And

numerous conferences were organized to address this perceived problem. During the late twentieth century the primary focus was on church growth. In recent years that focus has changed to what some have described as “missional”. And, over the last decade, many larger churches have also grown by adopting a multi-site approach, often with teaching broadcast across sites by satellite.

For church leaders and scholars trying to understand the reason behind this phenomenon of church decline, Postmodernism has been the term most frequently cited—a term used to describe the new era successive to the long-standing Modern period.<sup>1</sup> Following in the footsteps of Europe, North America has also become more secular. Arguably, Canada is now much closer to Europe than the USA in its degree of secularity. The forces of consumerism and personal narcissism have also pushed the church to the margins. The Sunday morning worship service is for many been pre-empted by other social activities.

“Leadership” is the other term at the top of the list in seeking to understand what is happening in the church. The suggestion that the church needs a new kind of leader is frequently heard. Often, business models of leadership were drawn upon to help church leaders understand the kind of leader they needed to become in this rapidly changing world.

I contend that the church was never intended to be in a place of power and prestige within the larger culture. The theme of exile and restoration is pervasive throughout Scripture. The most well-known exilic experience, highlighted by the exile of

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard Sweet, *PostModern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000). My first introduction to the term “postmodernism” came from reading Leonard Sweet’s book on the subject.

the people of Judah to Babylon, and their life without the presence of the Temple,<sup>2</sup> was graphically described by the Old Testament prophets. They saw exilic living as the means by which God could teach Israel about their role as a special called people and a way of life for such a called people. Jesus also lived an exilic life. Although he was active in the daily life in the community, he also remained separate and holy<sup>3</sup>. As well, the early church was in exile from mainstream society, as we will learn from the writer of the letter to the early dispersed church, 1 Peter, and yet it grew rapidly.

I propose that the Christian church ought to embrace a place of exile in society yet remain actively and naturally engaged within it as an integral part of mainstream society. However, it must not accommodate aspects of contemporary society and culture that do not align with the teaching of Jesus. The church needs to be a voice of humble and constructive critique to society and its institutions. Yet, for many churches, the temples<sup>4</sup> of the modern era continue to define and control the life and work of the church. I submit that an effective leader in the exilic church will adopt a position of exile in what I will describe as *Saturday leadership*.

In Chapter 1, I will identify the present ecclesial problem from personal experience as a leader in the church. I will also consider much of the literature that is currently addressing the church and culture. Out of this problem, I state my thesis as follows:

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<sup>2</sup> Jill Middlemas, *The Templeless Age: An Introduction to the History, Literature and Theology of the Exile* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007). This is a theme I have incorporated into my own thesis captured by Middlemas.

<sup>3</sup> Later in this dissertation I will add some commentary concerning the Hebrew understanding of the term “holy.”

<sup>4</sup> This is a term that will later be more fully defined for the manner in which it is used in this dissertation. In simple terms it is a metaphor for aspects of the local church that are distracting it from its ministry.

In a Postmodern, Post-Christendom world, the church must embrace a form of Saturday Leadership. It must maintain a place of exile from mainstream society, and yet remain fully engaged in all aspects of community life, while being set apart, holy. In practice, this means removing and eschewing the temples of this world, following Jesus as the head of the church, being communities of faithful presence, and carrying forward His ministry of hope and restoration to the world.

In Chapter 2, I will describe how the late modern church has been moved into a place of exile from mainstream society. In Chapter 3, I will examine the biblical exilic experiences of the People of Israel and what the contemporary church and its leadership can learn from those events. In Chapter 4, I will expand my examination of the exilic experiences in the Bible narrative; first for Jesus and then for the early church. In Chapter 5, I will provide some practical thoughts for the local church wishing to transition into what will be described as the *Saturday church*, being an exilic, temple-less, and missional community. In Chapter 6, I will explore what Saturday leadership might look like for the ecclesial leader. And, finally, in Chapter 7, I will provide some closing thoughts.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, several credible social commentators have observed that the church in the Western world no longer has a leadership role and, as such, influence on contemporary mainstream culture.<sup>1</sup> Since the time of Constantine, the Christian church has held a place of prominence and influence in all aspects of society. The church enjoyed a position of power, closely linked with the empires/governments it was part of. However, this is not the case today. Yet the perspective of the Church has, to a large extent, remained unchanged. The ecclesial leadership models are still based on business models of power and control. Large buildings, membership numbers, and revenues are the measures of success. The church must begin to see itself as distinct of its cultural context, in a sense, in exile in a secular world so influenced by interests that do not accord with the teaching and life of Jesus.

The question that this paper asks is whether the present exilic experience of the church is good or bad? I believe that it is good and is exactly where the church ought to be. And I propose that the leadership of the local church ought to embrace this reality. They need to encourage this position, and draw upon the exilic and pre and post-temple metaphors to re-imagine the life and work of the local church (and, by extension, the life of each member of the local church).

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<sup>1</sup> The two leading voices I draw upon are that of scholar and theologian Professor Walter Brueggemann and missiologist Michael Frost.

Jill Middlemas made the astute observation that the unifying feature of all the different exilic experiences for the people of Israel—those exiled to Babylon, those who fled to other countries, and those who remained in Judah—was the fact the Temple was destroyed.<sup>2</sup> She notes that “...these social, historical, and geographical circumstances provide the backdrop against which great literary activity took place, both recording the tragedy and confronting its challenges.”<sup>3</sup> Yet, in order for this new creativity to occur, it was necessary for the exilic communities of the Old Testament to acknowledge and accept their temple-less reality. If the late modern church is indeed experiencing exile, is it still clinging desperately to its own temples of power, prestige and possessions? And what other temples is it clinging to? Could it be the building or the comfortable inward focus? Has the Sunday worship event become the primary focus? If released, what new creativity and understanding might flow from this action? I believe the church and its leadership must embrace exile as a metaphor for their contemporary experience. I submit, based on the exilic experiences of Israel that abandoning the temples of contemporary society will be important for any true renewal of the local church. It is time for the church to see itself as an exilic, temple-less, missional community.

The life, work, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus are the connection between the exilic experience of the people of Israel and the early church that emerged after his resurrection. The most significant aspect of the exilic experience of Jesus occurred on Holy Saturday when Jesus was fully separated from the Father. The theme of Holy Saturday as the fullest expression of Jesus’ incarnation, figures prominently in the

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<sup>2</sup> Middlemas, *The Templeless Age: An Introduction to the History, Literature and Theology of the Exile* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 26.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

analysis and proposed application to the church and its leadership. This paper seeks to connect the biblical theme of exile, together with the exilic experience of Holy Saturday, with the place of the church in our current twenty-first century context, as it will help us to understand an important connection between Jesus and his bride, the church.

As part of the biblical background, I compare the early church experience with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century church. From the letter, ascribed to the Apostle Peter,<sup>4</sup> written to “God’s elect, exiles scattered ... (1 Peter 1:1), it seems clear that the early church was birthed in exile and remained in exile as it spread rapidly.<sup>5</sup> Peter, in his letter, offers instruction and encouragement, and these words continue to have importance for the church today.

Finally, I apply the exilic experience both to the church as a community of Christian faith—as followers of Jesus—and to the leadership of the church. I believe that the leadership of the local church extends beyond the pastoral and ministerial leadership and ought to include its lay leadership and ultimately every member of the local church. Yet in most churches in North America, the pastoral and ministerial leadership still exerts significant influence over the direction and ethos of the local church. So my primary focus, when directed to the leadership, will be directed to the paid leaders.

### **The Problem**

Church leaders and consultants have proposed several different approaches to address the problems facing the church. The church growth model was largely built upon

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<sup>4</sup> M. Eugene Boring, *1 Peter* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 30. There is considerable debate about whether the Apostle Peter was, in fact, the writer. It seems the more prevalent view is that he was not and the letter was probably written after his death.

<sup>5</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *First and Second Peter and Jude* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 17. Fred Craddock suggests this language means “they are exiles in the sense of not being fully at home in their environment, of being without the rights and privileges of citizens.” I agree that the first aspect ought to have application to 21st century Christians but the second would not be an accurate parallel for contemporary Western Christians, although it is true in certain parts of the world.

re-tooling the Sunday worship experience, as described by Frost and Hirsch as “attractional” ministry.<sup>6</sup> In part, as a reaction to the mega-church growth phenomenon, the Emerging Church movement took hold in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century.<sup>7</sup> While this movement produced a considerable body of literature, and was the subject of both modest and severe critiques, it was unable to maintain momentum. Yet the influence of the emerging church movement continues for many churches.<sup>8</sup> There has also been the “organic church” movement. It’s most visible early proponent, Neil Cole,<sup>9</sup> continues to lead the way for this low-key movement of growing organic (and typically small) churches. Frank Viola has narrated a leadership role for the organic church movement.<sup>10</sup> As part of this organic church movement there is also a continuing growth of house churches. The emergent and organic movements have provided an important influence on the larger church. They have recovered the realization that the Gospel of belief and proclamation needs to be balanced with a Gospel of action and deed.

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission For the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 18.

<sup>7</sup> The term “emerging church” started to be heard in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century although its evolution started earlier. A number of pastors became associated with churches that fell under this umbrella. The leaders of this “movement”—if one can call it that—were loosely organized under a website known as “Emergent Village.” A number of books were written with this term as part of their title. Recently, Tony Jones, one of the founders of the emergent movement, has released his own self-published book called *The Church is Flat: The Relational Ecclesiology of the Emerging Church Movement* (Anthony Hawthorne Jones, 2011) Kindle e-book. In this book, Jones responds to several books that have been published concerning the emerging church movement, seeking to provide a deeper study from an ecclesiological perspective.

<sup>8</sup> While the influence seems to be diminishing, the term continues to have some traction as new publications emerge.

<sup>9</sup> Neil Cole, *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Frank Viola, “Beyond Evangelical,” Frank Viola. <http://frankviola.wordpress.com/2010/09/07/missional-organic-church-an-interview-with-neil-cole-frank-viola/> (accessed February 20, 2011). Frank Viola provides a comprehensive summary of his understanding of the “organic church” in his blog as part of a joint interview with Neil Cole.

Over the past decade there has been an enormous shift in focus of churches as they sought to understand the meaning of “missional” within their individual contexts. Previously the focus meant, generally speaking, increasing the number of people who would attend a church worship service and hear the gospel message proclaimed. The pre-missional expectation was that new members would join the church either through transfer or baptism. However, the term “missional” generally refers to growth by means of evangelism. As such, in the last decade there has been renewed focus on the church being a sent people, involved in the community. This is often realized by the church addressing issues of poverty, social needs, justice and the environment. It has been amazing to see some of the incredible outreach efforts—particularly those of many mega-churches, which, because of their sheer size, are most visible.

Yet there are many continuing challenges facing the local church. I see this in my local community as churches continue to struggle with their present identity, and defining what and where they are called to do and be within their community. I hear it as I speak with pastors—particularly younger pastors. I continue to be troubled by the growing Christian celebrity culture. There are an ever increasing number of conferences and many church leaders and writers seem to be on a conference circuit. I believe the problem is that so much of our Western church culture continues to live in and be influenced by the Modern era and the modern paradigm of Christianity, even as the missional language is spoken. The church generally has not acknowledged its loss of significant influence in culture, especially in the judicial and governmental aspects of Western society. For many in our society, the church has lost its place of moral influence as well. One need only watch late night television to see the disdain the hosts have for the Christian church and

its leaders. The Christendom influence is still very strong over the church, particularly as a default position in the face of challenges. Yet, it is submitted that there is great hope for the future of the contemporary church in a late modern or early post-modern environment.

### **A Proposed Solution**

I submit that the church ought to embrace its place of exile within society to be called and sent, as missional communities, just as Jesus intended. When I use the term “sent,” I mean being faithfully present in the community rather than cloistered within a comfortable church environment. The greatest portion of the biblical narrative takes place within an exilic experience. The people of Israel learned of their true calling as people of God—to be a light to the nations through their care for the poor, the widows, the infirm and the marginalized—in the context of their exilic experiences. During this time, the people of Israel learned to experience God without the Temple. Within the exilic context, the great prophets spoke of restoration. Jesus came while the Jewish people were still living in an experience of exile as a conquered nation under Roman rule. Their Temple had been restored but it was not being used for its purpose.<sup>11</sup> Jesus offered the hope of restoration and renewal that had been called for by the prophets. Symbolically, on the Holy Saturday, the curtain in the Temple hung torn. The curtain represented the separation between Yahweh and the people of Israel. The resurrection of Jesus on the following day confirmed for his disciples that he truly was the Messiah as promised by the prophets. Yet, the followers of Jesus, as the early church expanded to regions away

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<sup>11</sup> This is dramatically demonstrated when Jesus overturned the money-changer tables, a few days before his journey to the cross (Mark 11:15-17).

from Jerusalem, remained in exile as noted by the writer(s) of 1 Peter (1 Peter 1:1). This writer encouraged the scattered church to live a life fully devoted to Jesus, holy and separate while also actively engaged with the local community. The early church grew rapidly, spreading the gospel and making disciples, despite its exilic experience and despite enormous persecution.

Today each local church must honestly examine their metaphorical temples. While a temple can provide focus, it may distract from the true and important focus of following Jesus as head of the church and its only temple. Temples may take various forms. It could be a building or a commitment to self-focus. It may be a desire to stand out in the community because of size, influence or prominence rather than the quiet behind the scenes work with the poor and the marginalized. The same questions apply to church leaders. What are the temples in one's personal life? Are these temples hindering the ability for the leader to follow Jesus into exile? To best explore how the church may learn from the biblical story, it is important to first better understand the current context and cultural environment for the church.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE LATE MODERN CHURCH IN EXILE

There is a growing sensitivity to the impact of postmodernism on the church as our Western culture transitions from the modern to a postmodern worldview. In the middle of the Twentieth-Century, an understanding began to develop that the profound influences of the period of Enlightenment, the era that formed the Modern period, was coming to an end. It seemed that our present society was living in an “in-between time”—after modernism and before the next era. Without yet knowing what to name this new era, the word “post” was added. Otto Scharmer quotes the late Czech president, Václav Havel, on this subject:

I think there are good reasons for suggesting that the modern age has ended. Today, many things indicate that we are going through a transitional period, when it seems that something is on the way out and something else is painfully being born. It is as if something were crumbling, decaying, and exhausting itself—while something else, still indistinct, were rising from the rubble.<sup>1</sup>

Although Havel made this comment in 1994, it seems that society in general is still struggling through this transition in the early second decade of the new millennium. There continues to be disagreement about whether society truly has entered a new period or whether this is still another phase of the modern era. And the church, an institution so profoundly shaped by the modern period, continues to wrestle with the implications of these societal changes on its organizational structures, its leadership and its ministry.

Relativism, one of the characteristics of the postmodern culture, has been perhaps most challenging for the church. Within our culture is a growing pervasive sense of “individualized truth in which each person is free to hold his or her own perception of

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<sup>1</sup> C. Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges* (Cambridge, MA: The Society for Organizational Learning, Inc., 2007), 1. From a speech delivered in Philadelphia, July 4, 1994.

truth.”<sup>2</sup> This has created enormous challenges for Christian leaders. But postmodernism and relativism are aspects of the several influences upon the late modern church. James Davison Hunter rightly observed that, “consumerism, individualism, the therapeutic and managerial ideologies have gone far to undermine the authority of the Christian movement and its traditions.”<sup>3</sup> There have been extensive attempts to understand and develop responses to these influences, in the writing of books, articles, blogs and the creation of new conferences. And from these writings and conferences, different approaches, both theological and practical, have been embraced by the various expressions of the local church.

I will not explore more than superficially the meaning of postmodernism and relativism or the perceived and real impact of these new realities for the Christian church. That has been done at great length elsewhere. The profound implications for the church is acknowledged and assumed for purposes of this writing.<sup>4</sup> This dissertation seeks to build upon the observation (one which has become more common over the past two decades) that the church has been placed in a position of exile from its host culture. The use of the term “exile” in this respect is not that of political exile. Rather, the exilic metaphor draws from the different experiences of the people of Israel. Some were removed from their country of Judah and taken to Babylon. Others were forced to flee their homeland, or

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<sup>2</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 27.

<sup>3</sup> James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, & Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 92.

<sup>4</sup> As I discuss, the transition from the modern period to the postmodern period is probably still under way. James Davison Hunter, as part of the title to his book, describes the period we now live in as the “late modern world.” See Hunter, *To Change the World*. In the future, the description of what is being sensed as a new era may not be postmodernism. Because of the current uncertainty, it may be safer to describe the current time as “late modern,” as chosen by Hunter.

experienced exile within their own devastated land under the control of a foreign nation. Indeed the exilic experience came out of the colonization of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. The words in Nehemiah express this exilic reality: “So now today we are slaves in the land of plenty . . . we serve them at their pleasure, and we are in great misery.” (Nehemiah 9: 36-39). In this Chapter, I will draw upon the theme of “relinquishment and reception,”<sup>5</sup> allowing the old to pass away in order to receive the new. This theme, expressed by the prophets Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah, will be explored more fully.

Although the Christian church itself has not been physically separated from the rest of its host culture, it has been separated as an organization that provides leadership and influence to the surrounding culture. Christians in the western church are aware that things have changed. Most established denominations have experienced a loss in the number of member churches. Individual churches have seen their numbers decline and there has been a general aging of congregations. In addition, the church has lost much of its influence over the life and culture of the nations in which it is located and within communities where local churches have their constituency. Hunter observes that: “The culture-producing institutions of historical Christianity are largely marginalized in the economy of culture formation in North America.”<sup>6</sup>

The greatest impact of these changes has been felt by what is described as “mainline” denominations. Denominations have sought answers as to why these changes have occurred. Numerous conferences have been staged. Most of the responses have been programmatic in nature—changes in worship style, seeker-sensitive worship,

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<sup>5</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

contemporary music, and use of technology to enhance the worship experience, being the most common response. A new genre of conference emerged described as the “church growth conference.” This was in response to the loss of numbers, arguably the greatest concern for the church, and focused on how to attract greater numbers into the church. The programmatic approach seemed like a winning strategy for awhile. It was argued that attracting greater numbers of people into the church family, with an emphasis on what was, in that context, described as the “un-churched,” was part of the mandate of the local church.<sup>7</sup> The collateral benefit was improved finances and the ability to offer better programs. As noted, Frost and Hirsch have described this methodology as “attractional” ministry.<sup>8</sup> Yet, those outside the church, particularly the emerging generations, became increasingly suspicious of the church and of Christians. Reggie McNeal concluded that: “The program-driven church has produced a brand of Christianity that is despised not just ignored by people outside the church.”<sup>9</sup> George Barna reported that: “Our research shows that local churches have virtually no influence in our culture.”<sup>10</sup> In addition, there are a growing number of Christians who are not comfortable with church as it is generally organized in North America. Barna concludes that millions of next generation young Christians have withdrawn from the church as they can no longer identify with the

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<sup>7</sup> In the latter decades of the 20th century, the ministry initiatives described had various descriptions, such as “outreach,” attracting the “unchurched” into the church community, and reaching the “lost.” In recent years, the term “missional” has gained favor. Proponents of this newer term have given it a broader meaning for the church and for individual followers of Jesus. The meaning is more holistic, incorporating both the life of the church as a corporate entity and the individual lives of those who are part of the church community.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 41-42.

<sup>9</sup> Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 93.

<sup>10</sup> George Barna, *Revolution* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers Inc., 2005), 118.

church.<sup>11</sup> He describes a “revolutionary movement” that seems to embrace Christianity and Jesus but is doing so largely outside of the church.<sup>12</sup> A Pew Research poll conducted in 2010 revealed that “an increasing number of Americans believe that religion is losing its influence on American life.”<sup>13</sup> In a study commissioned by the Fermi Project,<sup>14</sup> the researchers interviewed numerous young people between the ages of 16 and 29.<sup>15</sup> The author’s observed that the title of their resulting book, *unChristian*, “reflects outsiders’ most common reaction to the faith: they think Christians no longer represent what Jesus had in mind, that Christianity in our society is not what it was meant to be.”<sup>16</sup> In Canada, the largest mainline denomination, The United Church of Canada, launched a multi-million dollar web-based inter-active dialogue in an effort to engage with the next-generations.<sup>17</sup> Whether this expensive initiative has translated into a meaningful increase in hoped for participation within the United Church remains an open question.

Several years ago, Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon observed that: “All sorts of Christians are waking up and realizing that it is no longer “our world”—if it ever

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 29-39.

<sup>13</sup> Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, “67% - Religion Losing Influence in America.” Pew Research Center: The Databank, <http://pewresearch.org/databank/dailynumber/?NumberID=1079> (accessed January 29, 2011). For a commentary on this research, see Tim Schraeder, “No One Cares about Your Church,” Catalystspace, [http://www.catalystspace.com/content/read/SEP10\\_article\\_no\\_one\\_cares\\_about\\_your\\_church--tim\\_schraeder/](http://www.catalystspace.com/content/read/SEP10_article_no_one_cares_about_your_church--tim_schraeder/) (accessed September 20, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Fermi Project website: [http://www.fermiproject.com/?gclid=CJHm\\_K3OpJICFSCuQAod0FmWMQ](http://www.fermiproject.com/?gclid=CJHm_K3OpJICFSCuQAod0FmWMQ), now integrated with the website for Q Ideas, <http://www.qideas.org/> (accessed January 1, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, “Unchristian: Change the Perception,” *unChristian*. <http://www.unchristian.com/> (accessed January 1, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> Dave Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 15.

<sup>17</sup> United Church of Canada, <http://united-church.ca> and Emerging Spirit, <http://www.emergingspirit.ca/> (accessed January 1, 2012).

was.”<sup>18</sup> Walter Brueggemann echoes this sentiment suggesting that “... establishment Christianity and establishment culture have been in a close and no longer sustainable alliance.”<sup>19</sup> Alan Hirsch writes: “We find ourselves lost in a perplexing global jungle where our well-used cultural and theological maps don’t seem to work anymore...and that the church as we know it faces a very significant adaptive challenge.”<sup>20</sup> Diana Butler Bass suggests: “All organized belief—especially traditional Western religion—has been dislodged even as a custodian of national morality and ethics—replaced instead by the authority of the autonomous individual.”<sup>21</sup>

During the past several years that I have been working on this project, the movement towards a society that is, to a great extent, no longer significantly influenced by Christian culture has continued to develop rapidly. In *The Next Christians*, Gabe Lyons identifies a significant moment in the transition for America with the death of Rev. Jerry Falwell in 2007. Rev. Falwell was long identified as an influential leader of the religious right, which held enormous political influence. CNN commentator Anderson Cooper, covering the event, called in noted atheist Christopher Hitchens to offer his thoughts, something that would have been unheard of only a few years earlier.<sup>22</sup> Jon Meacham expresses this new reality suggesting that “our politics and our culture are, in the main, less influenced by movements and arguments of an explicitly Christian

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<sup>18</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People who Know that Something is Wrong* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 17.

<sup>19</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home: Preaching Among Exiles* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 3.

<sup>20</sup> Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 16.

<sup>21</sup> Diana Butler Bass, *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004), 24.

<sup>22</sup> Gabe Lyons, *The Next Christians: The Good News about the End of Christian America: How a New Generation is Restoring the Faith* (New York: Doubleday, 2010), 14-17.

character than they were even five years ago.”<sup>23</sup> Meacham shares my own view that this is a positive trend for the future of America, as I believe it has been for Canada, and for the future of Christianity.<sup>24</sup>

However, the predominant reaction to the changes experienced by the Western church has not been hopeful but rather angst and fear for the future of the church. This has led to the many quick fix programmatic responses to the perceived crisis. There has also been a general denial that things have changed for the church. Daniel Smith-Christopher makes the important observation that, “From the time of Augustine, a major line of Christian tradition has assumed that the health of Christianity and the vitality of its intellectual traditions required what Yoder simply summarized as “being in charge.”<sup>25</sup> The larger Christian movement, generally in the form of charitable organizations, has attempted to continue its place of power and influence through the political process. Initially, this space was occupied by the religious conservative groups. In more recent years, the Christian left has become active in political lobbying, Jim Wallis and the Sojourners organization perhaps being most active and visible.<sup>26</sup> I agree with Davison Hunter when he suggests: “The worst possible conclusion, then, is what Christians need is a new strategy for achieving and holding on to power in the world—at least in any

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<sup>23</sup> Jon Meacham, “The End of Christian America,” The Daily Beast, <http://www.newsweek.com/2009/04/03/the-end-of-christian-america.html> (accessed January 1, 2012).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel L Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 12.

<sup>26</sup> James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 110-166. An extensive summary of the trends for Christian groups to seek power and influence through the political process,

conventional sense,<sup>27</sup> I argue that the significant but necessary challenge for the church is to let go of its perceived place of authority and power.

Yet, in recent years, there has also been a growing response that welcomes the place in which the church finds itself in contemporary culture. Walter Brueggemann is perhaps one of the first to draw a comparison between the people of Israel in exile and the contemporary church in exile, building upon an exilic metaphor. He sees hope for the church, in part because "...exile evoked the most brilliant literature and the most daring theological articulation in the Old Testament."<sup>28</sup> If this was the case so long ago, what exciting new missional, theological, and humanitarian initiatives are possible if the church again understands its place in exile?

Perhaps of even greater interest is an emerging sense that Christians must not only see themselves within exile, but also to move into exile as a prevailing personal attitude and lifestyle. Exile can be real, whether it is chosen or it is enforced.<sup>29</sup> The sense of exile implies a separation from a homeland in political terms. However, even the exilic experience of the people of Israel provides a broader perspective on the exilic experience. Douglas Harink writes: "the homeland from which the church is separated is not heaven, but creation itself, still suffering under bondage to powers opposed to the reign of God."<sup>30</sup> In the western world, the current sense of exile is also that of separation from what has been thought of as a Christian world. The church may be encouraged by the fact there is

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>28</sup> Brueggemann, *Cadences*, 3. It is possible to see Dietrich Bonhoeffer as a 20<sup>th</sup>-century exile, able from his context in Nazi Germany to offer constructive critique both of the church and the political system. From his place of exile, notably while in prison, he was able to produce some of the most prescient and influential theological works of that century.

<sup>29</sup> Smith-Christopher, *Theology of Exile*, 28. Frost, *Exiles*, 49. Michael Frost sees the incarnation itself as voluntary exile on the part of Jesus and I agree with this interpretation.

<sup>30</sup> Douglas Harink, *1 & 2 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 1999), 34.

strong historical precedent for the church to be in exile from the host Empire.<sup>31</sup> The early church thrived and grew rapidly in exile. It was only after the time of Constantine, when the church received political and social legitimacy, that it became associated with and part of the Empire. The good news is that there is an emerging awareness at this time, living in an era that is referred to as Post-Christendom—also referred to as Post-Constantinian—that Christians must assume a position of exile from the dominant Empire culture.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps Jesus always intended for the church to be in a place of exile from the host Empire and for Christians to live within their communities from an exilic perspective.<sup>33</sup> This is not to be separated from the local community. It is to refuse to permit the dominant Empire and cultural standards from influencing one's journey as a follower of Jesus. Brueggemann captures the struggle to live with this perspective, observing that “the community of Faith, of course, never lives in a vacuum. It is always in the midst of cultural reality, which is thick and dense and powerful.”<sup>34</sup> As the exiles in Babylon were tempted to adapt to and succumb to the Babylonian culture, the church today, and Christians as individuals, easily become assimilated within the dominant culture, losing their way as followers of Jesus.

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<sup>31</sup> . Dibin Samuel, “Church in China experiencing ‘tremendous’ growth,” Christian Today, <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/church.in.china.experiencing.tremendous.growth/26420.htm> (accessed August 7, 2011). More contemporary examples of the church thriving in exile include the rapid growth of the church in China during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the Black church in the United States. The church in China continues to thrive under the radar of the government for fear of persecution

<sup>32</sup> Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2004). An excellent treatment of the subject of post-Christendom and postmodernism.

<sup>33</sup> We get a sense of his perspective in John 17:16 when Jesus prays for his disciples, saying, “They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.”

<sup>34</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Texts that Linger Words that Explode: Listening to Prophetic Voices* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 73.

In this culture of pervasive materialism and technological advances, as an active participant in the life of the community, it is easy to fall prey to its powers. It is not only the nation-states that are the host empire of our culture. Now, the large multi-national corporations have become the true empire within the exilic metaphor. Brueggemann, again, wisely observes: “It seems evident that *technical individualism* coupled with *unlimited and unbridled corporate power and corporate wealth* that appear to be beyond the governance of nation-states has created a set of cultural values that are aggressively antihuman.”<sup>35</sup> One of the key features of postmodern society is its sense that the individual is of primary importance. Narcissism is pervasive and prevalent.

Many, including several already referenced, have compared the exilic experience of the people of Israel with that of the contemporary church. They generally wrote out of the experience in America. For example, Michael Frost, an Australian, has spent considerable time in the USA. Can similar comparisons be made in Canada? Certainly, it seems that the USA is more outwardly Christian than Canada.<sup>36</sup> Even committed evangelical Canadian Christians tend to be less vocal about their faith.<sup>37</sup> A poll conducted in November of 2010 by *The Globe and Mail* reveals, that for Canada, “we’ve seen a sea change in 40 years, a march toward secularization that mirrors what’s happened in

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>36</sup> During the 2008 U.S. presidential election period, I watched talk show host Glenn Beck interview Sarah Palin. He stated he believed there were “eternal consequences” for the actions of those in leadership. He asked Ms. Palin whether she shared this view. She responded positively. In Canada such a position would not be stated nor such a question asked except, perhaps, on Christian broadcasting networks.

<sup>37</sup> For example, the Prime Minister of Canada, The Honourable Stephen Harper, is an evangelical Christian but rarely speaks of his faith in public.

Europe.”<sup>38</sup> And for committed Christians in Canada, they face the same influences of the Empire as previously described. Most of the television programs and movies watched by Canadians are the same as those watched by Americans. The influence of global multinational corporations is as pervasive in Canada as in America. There is the similar influence of Western materialism.

The Christian church in Canada has generally followed the lead of the evangelical churches in the United States, implementing programmatic change in response to its continuing loss of influence in the wider culture. Gary Nelson wrote: “My involvement with colleagues and peers in the United States has helped me realize that often what they are describing as the changing landscape of church life in America is in truth what we Canadians have already experienced.”<sup>39</sup> One need only travel to the large malls on Sunday morning to realize that most Canadians no longer see church attendance as important in their lives. Nelson adds: “Now, church attendance on a given Sunday in Canada is more like 13 percent. In some urban settings, it is even much lower.”<sup>40</sup> So it is my observation and argument that Dr. Brueggemann’s words, and others like his, apply to Canadian Christians as well, although our response may be different.

One of the key differences between the USA and Canada is that Canada does not have a great number of mega-churches. Each major city does have large churches but not of the size found in the USA. The American mega-church phenomenon tends to dominate the Christian conversation and many churches live under the shadow of the large mega-

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<sup>38</sup> Michael Valpy and Joe Friesen, “Canada Marching from Religion to Secularization,” *The Globe and Mail*, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/canada-marching-away-from-religion-to-secularization/article1833451/> (accessed January 29, 2011).

<sup>39</sup> Gary V. Nelson, *Borderland Churches: A Congregation’s Introduction to Missional Living* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2008), 3.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

church. That may be less so in Canada. From personal observation living in south-western Ontario, the most populous part of the country, and visiting many churches, the majority of churches are smaller.

It seems to be the case that the church is more clearly in exile within Canada than it is in the United States. Religion and matters of faith have not been present in the Canadian political process for perhaps three decades.<sup>41</sup> By contrast, in America, the Christian Right<sup>42</sup> held significant influence in the political arena for the past three decades although it seems to have held a declining influence during the 2008 and 2012 races for the US presidency. While there is still plenty of “faith” debate, it seems that the Christian Right is losing the power base it had in the past. John McCain, the Republican candidate for the 2008 presidential election, generally ignored speaking of his Christian faith during his campaign.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps in recent years, it is the Christian left that has held greater influence in American politics.<sup>44</sup> As noted earlier, these efforts by the Christian right and left may be desperate and misguided efforts to influence culture through the political process and judicial establishment. It is probably too early to tell, but the declining influence of the Christian based charitable organizations upon the political sphere may be signals that America is following in the footsteps of Europe, Canada, Australia and New Zealand and becoming more of a secular country in which the

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<sup>41</sup> Gary Nelson suggests, in Canada, “... if our politicians have church affiliation, they are marked as “not to be trusted.” See, Nelson, 2. It is my view that this perspective is now changing and that church affiliation is not held against a politician but overt proclamation of this fact would be negatively perceived.

<sup>42</sup> This is a term developed to describe the conservative evangelical presence, active in political persuasion, within the United States.

<sup>43</sup> John Ibbitson, “Politics in God’s Country,” *The Globe and Mail*, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/archives/article675491.ece> (accessed January 1, 2012).

<sup>44</sup> The Christian left is identified most frequently with the organization known as Sojourners, led by Jim Wallis, president and CEO of Sojourners and editor-in-chief of *Sojourners* magazine at <http://www.sojourners.com/>.

Christian church, and its sister Christian organizations, is largely marginalized and arguably “in exile” from mainstream culture. Certainly, it is my belief this has been the reality for some time in Canada. Yet, even in Canada, the church struggles to accept the loss of its historical relationship with its surrounding culture. There is good precedent for this failure of acceptance in the biblical narrative.

Long before the physical exile occurred for Israel, its prophets warned the leadership and people of Israel that disaster would befall them if they failed to return to their calling as the people of God. It was only after the displacement occurred, and then only after reality sunk in with the help of Ezekiel and others within the exiled community, that relinquishment of the past occurred. Only in the context of a near-death experience could the exiled community re-imagine a future as a people restored in its relationship with Yahweh. There are contemporary Christian leaders who are warning the Western church, that clinging to a modern view of the church as an institution of power and prominence, with the attendant comfort and predictability, is not its appropriate role.<sup>45</sup>

An institution of power and prominence is not what Jesus had in mind for the church. It does not fit with His incarnation and personal exile. It does not fit with His relinquishment in order to receive Resurrection. It is only in recent years, as the postmodern worldview becomes more pervasive, that the voices crying in the wilderness are starting to be heard. While some in church leadership may decry the waning influence

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<sup>45</sup> The leaders who are referenced in this paper include Walter Brueggemann, Michael Frost, James Davison Hunter and Craig A. Carter. It is arguable that these contemporary voices are prophetic for this time.

of modernism, arguably, I believe that postmodernism is the best thing that could have happened for the legitimacy of the Christian church.

While it is easy to identify the mega-churches as being part of the power base of culture, it should be noted that many mega-churches are themselves moving into an exilic relationship with the host empire. Yet in many sectors of the Christian community there is still no sense of change in its relationship with society or any sense of exile. The fact that there is continuing growth in the many mega-churches of America, many experiencing financial power and significant structural presence, contributes to the sense that all continues to be well, at least from the Christendom perspective of the role of the Church in society and culture. Even among churches that are struggling and grappling with declining memberships, there is often a tenacious holding on to the past. Many continue as isolated enclaves with a primary focus on the Sunday gathering, constituting more of a club—what Frost describes as “pseudo-community.”<sup>46</sup> The truth is that, if most of our churches were to close, few in the wider community would notice—or care. In many ways, the contemporary church has assimilated gods of contemporary culture into its own culture, therefore losing its distinctive character.

The great prophets of the Old Testament warned against worship of other gods, the attitudes of power and self-interest. They consistently urged the community to consider others first, to seek justice and take care of the poor, the widows and the orphans.<sup>47</sup> So, what can the church today learn from the exilic experience of the people of Israel? One of the most important questions for contemporary Christians to explore may

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<sup>46</sup> Frost, *Exiles*, 121.

<sup>47</sup> The most frequently cited prophetic admonition is found in Micah 6:8. See also Isa. 1:17 for a strongly worded Isaianic indictment.

be: “What are the gods that are distracting Christians? What are the temples that provide an alternative focus? Is the church sufficiently tuned into the plight of the poor and issues of justice? What ought to be relinquished in order for a fresh wind of creativity to be received?” What changes in lifestyle ought to be embraced by followers of Jesus? It has become common knowledge that little distinguishes the lifestyle of Christians from others in Western society. First it may be helpful to understand how and why the biblical exile happened and how the people of Israel responded to the profound disruption of that experience.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE EXILIC AND TEMPLE-LESS EXPERIENCE OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL

#### **The Jewish Exile: How did it Happen?**

The record of the Jewish exile is not extensive nor is it clear in the literature of the Old Testament. The writers of this period were more interested in the theological implications than the historical events surrounding it.<sup>1</sup> Even though it seems that the exilic period produced extensive and creative writing, there does not appear to be much attention paid to the actual historical events of the exilic experience. It requires a reading and synthesizing of several different sources to understand what events led to the exilic experience. These reveal how extensive was the exile, where the exiles lived, their response to exile (both theologically and physically), what was the length of their exile and how did restoration from exile occur.

The nation of Israel was separated into two nations many years earlier—north and south—each with its own king. The Northern kingdom of Israel was driven into exile several decades earlier,<sup>2</sup> but little is written of that experience. The great prophets focused primarily on the exile of the Southern kingdom. There is some certainty about the dating of this theologically more important exilic event. Peter Ackroyd suggests: “That Jerusalem was captured by the Babylonians in March 597 B.C. is now established on the basis of the biblical evidence and of the Wiseman tablets which provide us with a

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<sup>1</sup> Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 72.

<sup>2</sup> See the narrative at 2 Kings 17:1-23 where the events leading up to the captivity and removal of the Israelites from Samaria, including some theological explanation for this devastating event.

precise sequence of events.”<sup>3</sup> However, within the biblical narrative itself, there is evidence of four separate exiles.<sup>4</sup>

The limited historical record shows that the Southern kingdom of Judah was defeated by the growing power of the Babylonian kingdom that rapidly broadened its territory against the Assyrians and the Egyptians. The city of Jerusalem and surrounding lands, so strategically placed in proximity to Egypt, was an important piece of its acquisition plans. The prophetic voices within Israel saw it differently. This was part of God’s plan to punish a disobedient nation. The nation of Israel was called to have a special relationship with Yahweh, to be a nation of justice, to avoid worship of other gods, and, in this way, to be an example to the surrounding nations. It repeatedly failed in that calling.

So God, through his prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah, warned of the impending disaster. The prophet Jeremiah was living in the midst of the events leading up to and during the exile to Babylon. The prophet Isaiah had issued his warnings much earlier, during the Assyrian period in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century. These prophetic warnings were unheeded, both by the Israelites of the Northern kingdom and later by the people of Judah in the Southern kingdom. The prophets called for repentance, yet the kings did not repent and they did not require the respective nations to repent. Could it be that a similar repentance is appropriate for the contemporary church?<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Peter R. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration: A Study of Hebrew Thought of the Sixth Century B.C.* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1968), 20.

<sup>4</sup> The different dates are around the years 605 BCE (Dan. 1); 597 BCE (2 Kings 25); 587/6 BCE (2 Kings 25); and 582 BCE (Jer. 52:30).

<sup>5</sup> Craig A. Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture: A Post-Christendom Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 201. Carter insightfully suggests that the church ought to repent of “the Christendom project”.

When the exile was inevitable, the prophet Jeremiah urged the leaders and the people of Israel to go willingly, to make a new life in exile, and to seek the blessing of their captors. King Jehoiachin followed this advice. He and his family cooperated and were part of the first exilic event in 597 (2 Kings 24:15-16). Jehoiachin's uncle, whose name was changed to Zedekiah, was appointed by the Babylonian king as ruler over Judah (2 Kings 24:17).

Zedekiah initially cooperated, but after nine years of reign he rebelled (2 Kings 24:20). In retaliation, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the Temple (2 Kings 25:1-21). The King and his sons were taken away, the sons murdered before him, and he was blinded and taken in shackles to Babylon. This defining exilic event took place from 587, when the siege of Jerusalem began, to 586, ten years after the first exile. At this time a much larger group of Jews were taken to Babylon and 2 Kings records that only the poorest were left behind (25:12).<sup>6</sup> Much of the valuables in the Temple were taken to Babylon (25:13-17).

Gedaliah was put in charge of the remaining people in Judah. Gedaliah shared the views of Jeremiah and urged the people to "settle down in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it will go well with you" (25: 24). Only seven months after this appointment, Ishmael "came with ten men and assassinated Gedaliah" (25:25). This created fear in the land and "...all the people from the least to the greatest, together with

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<sup>6</sup> 2 Kings 24:14b. This was also true of the first exile according to the same authors of 2 Kings. The two descriptions are difficult to reconcile. The fact the Babylonians left much of the working class behind suggests that they valued the commercial opportunities arising from the products grown in Judah. And in 2 Kings 25:12, "But the commander left behind some of the poorest people of the land to work the vineyards and fields."

the army officers, fled to Egypt for fear of the Babylonians” (25:26).<sup>7</sup> At this point, those left behind were much smaller in number and their experiences are vividly portrayed in the laments of the people, recorded in the book of Lamentations. It is likely that over time many who had fled returned to Judah and Jerusalem as there is evidence of an active community at the time of the later restoration (Nehemiah 1:2-3). And just as it was the case for the exiled people of Judah, the Christian church today seems unwilling to embrace its inevitable exile into post-Christendom.

### **Features of the Babylonian Host Empire**

It is not clear from the biblical record how the Babylon host culture felt about the people of Israel or their religious beliefs and practices. Perhaps because the Babylonians worshiped multiple gods, they were tolerant of the faiths of the people groups they conquered. In this sense, the Babylonian society may have been quite pluralistic. King Jehoiachin and his family were treated well and he was eventually released to take a respected position within the Babylonian court (2 Kings 25:27-30).<sup>8</sup> Rainer Albertz suggests that the release of the king was important and may reveal a change in the disposition of the Babylonians towards the Jews; a more accommodating one.<sup>9</sup> There is evidence of tolerance for the religious practices of the Jews, as these same practices continued to develop and be refined during the exile. As well, the role of the priest

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<sup>7</sup> *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*: vol. 2, ed. David Noel Freedman, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 445-455. There was evidence of a large Jewish community that grew in Egypt, especially at Alexandria. Corroborative evidence is contained in the Elephantine Papyri documents, a description of which can be found in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*.

<sup>8</sup> James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 308. There is corroborative evidence found in one of the excavated tablets (described as the Jehoiachin Ration tablet) for the king and his sons living in Babylon.

<sup>9</sup> Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 109.

continued and it shows development during the period of exile. It is also clear that Ezekiel was active in Babylon. Some scholars believe that it is likely Deutero-Isaiah lived and prophesied in Babylon. By the time the exile ended, many Jewish families had assimilated into the Babylonian culture to such an extent that they stayed behind and did not participate in the later return to Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup> To better understand the background for a Jewish response to exile, we continue by examining the living experience for the Jewish exiles.

### **Features of the Exilic Experience**

There is disagreement and a lack of clarity concerning the size of the first exile to Babylon. It seems that those exiled were largely those of the ruling and educated classes, “the cream of their country’s political, ecclesiastical, and intellectual leadership—which is why they were selected for deportation.”<sup>11</sup> 2 Kings 24:14 notes that Nebuchadnzzar, “...carried into exile all Jerusalem: all the officers and fighting men, and all the craftsmen and artisans—a total of ten thousand.” However, Jeremiah records that 4600 were taken in exile (52: 30). As a result, there is disagreement on the numbers exiled in Babylon during both the first and second phase of exile. There is also disagreement on how many were left behind in Judea. The Chronicler records that the entire remnant was removed to Babylon in 587 B.C. and became servants to the king (2 Chronicles 36: 20-21). But, Peter Ackroyd suggests, that it is “...probable that the deportations affected only a small

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<sup>10</sup> David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4, (New York: Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, 1992) 927-928. The famous Archive of Murashû, provides corroborative evidence, suggesting the Jews were involved in land transactions and contract work in Mesopotamia.

<sup>11</sup> John Bright, *The History of Israel*, 4th ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 345.

proportion of the population.”<sup>12</sup> It seems many also fled to other places, including a large number to Egypt.<sup>13</sup> In fact Jeremiah may have spent some time in Egypt before returning to Jerusalem (Jer 43:6-7).

The living experience of those exiled to Babylon is difficult to discern. While at the outset life may have been harsh, it seems that many remained obedient to the admonition of Jeremiah to make a new life. By the time of the later restoration to Jerusalem, many Jewish families had accumulated wealth and were able to support the mission back to Jerusalem and the project of rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem (Ezr. 1:6).

The experience of those left behind in Judah may have been harsher than that of those exiled in Babylon. The book of Lamentations poignantly expresses the experience of those left behind. “All her people groan as they search for bread; they barter their treasures for food to keep themselves alive” (Lam 1:11). While they remained in their native land, they felt the exile perhaps more so than those who were exiled to Babylon. Part of the possible depth of that experience was the regular reminder that the Temple, the primary connection to their faith, and the beloved city of Jerusalem were both destroyed. They also suffered economically as the countryside was devastated. However, Peter Ackroyd observed that: “The stress in I Kings 8 on the Temple as a place of prayer, rather than as a place of sacrifice, has been thought to point to continued observances of a more limited kind.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 22.

<sup>13</sup> Bright, *History of Israel*, 346

<sup>14</sup> Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 26.

It has also been suggested that the conditions for the exiles in Babylon may have deteriorated over time.<sup>15</sup> Some of the exiles may have been employed by the Babylonians (2 Chronicles 36:20). Others seem to have settled into communities and lived an agricultural life, engaging in all the normal aspects of community with marriage and families, in relative prosperity.<sup>16</sup> A key feature of the exilic experience was that Jehoiachin, who was the king of Judah at the time of the first conquest, was also taken captive to Babylon, together with his family (2 Kings 24:15-16).<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, as Psalm 137 reveals, there was a profound sense of loss; “By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.” (v.1)<sup>18</sup> There are numerous other examples within the biblical record that point to the extreme pain and loss experienced by the exiles both in Babylon and in Jerusalem.<sup>19</sup> The contemporary church may discern its best response to exile by gaining a better understanding of the Jewish responses to their exilic circumstance.

### **The Responses to Exile**

There is evidence in the Old Testament that the Jewish responses to exile were varied. From a theological perspective it is easy to understand why. The Temple (their connection with Yahweh) was destroyed, and the connection with the Davidic line of

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>17</sup> The fact that their king, while removed from power, was still with them in exile may have offered hope for restoration.

<sup>18</sup> Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 32.

<sup>19</sup> Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, 71-76.

kings was lost.<sup>20</sup> They probably had some hope in that King Jehoiachin was still among them in Babylon. However, the theological dislocation was traumatic as “almost all of the old symbol systems had been rendered useless.”<sup>21</sup> Some felt that Yahweh was the enemy and they were suffering for the sins of their forefathers.<sup>22</sup> The book of Lamentations captures this sentiment: “Our fathers sinned and are no more, and we bear their punishment” (Lam 5:7). Some of those who held this view, turned from Yahweh to worship the old and familiar idols of Canaan.<sup>23</sup> Others adopted the gods of their Babylonian captors which appeared to be more powerful, as Yahweh, in their eyes, failed to preserve the people in Judah.<sup>24</sup>

However, those who clung to their old life and beliefs started to pay great attention to four key distinctive observances developed during the Exodus—keeping the Sabbath, circumcision, holiness, and dietary laws. Some scholars hold that the strict rules recorded in Leviticus 21 were developed during the exile and in this way, “as the community thus clung to its past it prepared itself for the future.”<sup>25</sup> Daniel L. Smith recognizes this return to ritual as an important “means of protecting social boundaries, and thus a creative mechanism.”<sup>26</sup> The individual experience to this exile depended upon whether they followed the prophetic calls from Jeremiah and Ezekiel, or voices of others

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<sup>20</sup> Ralph W. Klein, *Israel in Exile: A Theological Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 3-4.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>23</sup> Jer.:44.

<sup>24</sup> Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 41, and Newsome, *Exodus*, 71.

<sup>25</sup> Bright, *History of Israel*, 350.

<sup>26</sup> Daniel L. Smith, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington: Meyer-Stone Books, 1989), 203.

among the exilic community.<sup>27</sup> In either case, with assistance from the great prophets (Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah), the Jewish exiles were able to retain their distinctive identity. Significant creative theological thinking and writing arose from this period. It is generally accepted that the synagogue came into existence during the exile “when those who had been deported would have found occasions to come together for prayer and meditation and to receive instruction.”<sup>28</sup>

The positive responses by many of the exiles to their life in Babylon can be highly instructive for the contemporary church. A significant feature is that a number of the Jewish exiles developed their historic observances, created the synagogue, and revisited their scriptural writings and oral traditions. These initiatives assisted their ability to remain a distinctive people group and not to be assimilated completely into the host culture. In this way they remained counter cultural. When the Persian Empire conquered the Babylonians, the distinctive Jewish community was still known. Therefore, King Cyrus was able to issue the proclamation to restore the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:2). It took courageous, thoughtful, and imaginative leadership for the exiled Jews to retain their distinctive religious history and to imagine a restored relationship with God.

### **Leadership of the Exilic Period**

#### *Jeremiah*

The prophet Jeremiah is conventionally thought to have prophesied between 625-581. It is also considered probable that his teachings were more fully developed during

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<sup>27</sup> Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 44.

<sup>28</sup> E.W. Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970), 134.

the exilic period and these teachings are known as the “tradition of Jeremiah.”<sup>29</sup> He began to prophesy during the reign of the highly regarded King Josiah, (Jer. 1: 2). King Josiah is perhaps best known for receiving the scroll of the law found in the Temple and being so convicted by it that he established a new era of morality and submission to the will of God (2 Kings 23). In this respect, Jeremiah was a kindred spirit to the king. He was a prophet who exhorted his people to follow the commands of Yahweh, and he warned them of the ultimate devastating consequences if they did not. Therefore, Josiah’s personal convictions and his leadership were welcomed by this great prophet.

Sadly, in the reign of Josiah, the people are described as “faithless Israel” and a “faithless people” (Jer. 3:8, 12). During this same period the political landscape was changing rapidly. The once powerful Egypt was losing its strength and the Assyrian kingdom was being threatened by the neo-Babylonian kingdom. As Josiah’s reign was followed by others who did not share his Judeo beliefs, Jeremiah’s concern for Judah was heightened and he warned the nation of an imminent conquest. “A besieging army is coming from a distant land, raising a war cry against the cities of Judah” (Jer. 4:16).

During the first assault by the Babylonians, King Jehoiachin followed the advice of Jeremiah, and his life and that of his family was spared. King Zedekiah sometimes listened to Jeremiah but, in an important decision regarding Babylon, he rejected the advice. He also made some fateful judgments in his relationships with the leaders of surrounding kingdoms. It was also during the reign of Zedekiah that Jeremiah battled with Hananiah for the hearts and minds of the people of Judah (Jer. 28). Hananiah tried to persuade the people that they would be saved from the Babylonians. However, Jeremiah

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<sup>29</sup> Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 10-15.

urged the people to submit and in so doing they would be saved. Symbolically, Jeremiah placed a yoke on his shoulders to demonstrate how the people were to submit. Hananiah removed the yoke and broke it on the ground. However, the falseness of his prophecy would be revealed through his own death seven months later (Jer. 28:17).

It was while Judah was still a separate kingdom under the rule of Zedekiah that Jeremiah delivered his famous letter to the exiles in Babylon. In it he urged the exiles to look positively upon their exile, to have families, to become part of the community, and he urged them to “seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile” (Jer. 29:7). He advised them to pray for their captors. “This advice to pray indicated that worship—without temple and cult—was possible for the Israelites in the unclean land of Babylon.”<sup>30</sup> The prophet Jeremiah is clear in his instructions in how to live as exiles. They were urged to look upon this experience as positive. To, “Build houses and settle down...marry and have sons and daughters...increase in number there...” (Jer. 29:5-6). In the same letter, Jeremiah alludes to those in Babylon who were urging the people in exile to take a different view of their circumstances. “Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you” (2 Kings 29:8). It seems there were those in Babylon who held a similar, but erroneous, view to that of Hananiah.

Jeremiah did offer hope. He prophesied: “yet even in those days,’ declares the Lord. ‘I will not destroy you completely’” (Jer. 5:18). And to symbolically demonstrate that hope for those left in Judah, he bought a field from his cousin Hanamel (Jer. 32:6-16). He declared: “For this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land” (Jer. 32:15). Peter Ackroyd

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<sup>30</sup> Klein, *Israel in Exile*, 50.

suggests that Jeremiah must have thought the real hope for the future rested with those who remained in Judah.<sup>31</sup> “In Chapter 33, the theme of absolute doom for the city (4-5) is countered by a promise of restoration (6-9). Similar reversals of doom follow in verses 10-13.”<sup>32</sup> This may explain why he refused to go to Babylon when given the opportunity.<sup>33</sup> The restoration themes of Jeremiah parallel those of Deutero-Isaiah.<sup>34</sup> He continued to live a difficult life, often imprisoned but continuing to be faithful in his prophesying. He warned of disaster that would come from failing to follow and trust in the will of Yahweh. And he offered hope to those who heeded the admonitions.

### *Ezekiel*

The prophet Ezekiel was a young priest in the Jerusalem Temple when, it is generally thought, he was carried off with King Jehoiachin and the other exiles to Babylon, in 597 B.C. His calling as a prophet occurred after his exile. His first writing came five years later. He may have been among those who read the letter from Jeremiah. His initial experience of the glory of God came through elaborate visions (Ezekiel 1) and such visions are frequent throughout the book of Ezekiel. It also provided a powerful witness to the exiles that God could be present outside of Jerusalem and the Temple.<sup>35</sup> At the time of his call, Jerusalem had not yet fallen. His initial prophecies were warnings against Jerusalem. Once in exile, he prophesied that the Jews should settle into their life in exile and give up hope of returning to Jerusalem. In this respect, Ezekiel echoed the

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<sup>31</sup> Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 57.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>33</sup> Klein, *Israel in Exile*, 53.

<sup>34</sup> Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 60.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

warnings of Jeremiah. Through his warnings of the pending doom for Jerusalem, he correspondingly reinforced the need for holiness among the exiles and a submission to and acceptance of their place in exile.

After the fall of Jerusalem and the arrival of the second wave of exiles, the prophet Ezekiel began to provide hope. Nothing worse could happen to the people of Israel. James Newsome wrote: “In this fresh climate Ezekiel continued to dream, but his visions were now permeated with this new orientation of hope.”<sup>36</sup> His final vision of hope provided details of a restored Temple (Ezek. 40-48). Ezekiel explained that the hope for the people of Israel was not because of anything they had done. In a profound and fresh theological perspective, Ezekiel made it clear that the restoration of the people would only occur because Yahweh intended to defend his holy name before the nations.<sup>37</sup> The people of Israel had ignored and completely forgotten the absolute holiness of Yahweh.<sup>38</sup>

*Second Isaiah, also known as Deutero-Isaiah*<sup>39</sup>

This prophet, who continued in the tradition of the original prophet Isaiah, is thought to have come from the priestly class living in Babylon. He is believed to have authored at least Chapters 40 to 55 of what we know as the book of Isaiah. Christopher Seitz, a leading Old Testament scholar, suggests there is now a “basic view that Second Isaiah was an individual prophet active in Babylonian exile.”<sup>40</sup> His oracles were delivered

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<sup>36</sup> James D. Newsome, *Exodus*, (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1998), 88.

<sup>37</sup> Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 73-81.

<sup>38</sup> This continues to be a perspective of Christians. Often, it seems God is made small and trivialized in our words about Him, in our worship and in our music.

<sup>39</sup> Newsome, *Exodus*, 117. Newsome describes this prophet as the Babylonian Isaiah.

<sup>40</sup> Christopher R. Seitz, *Zion's Final Destiny: The Development of the Book of Isaiah* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 16.

late in the exilic period, as the Babylonian empire was being threatened by its neighbors.<sup>41</sup> The powerful and growing Persian Empire under its leader Cyrus now offered the exiles new hope that restoration from exile would be forthcoming.

Deutero-Isaiah does not make the same harsh accusations against the people of Judah as were made by Jeremiah and Ezekiel.<sup>42</sup> He is still clear that it was their moral failures and breach of faith that led to the destruction of Jerusalem. However, the oracles of Second Isaiah “are characterized by a spirit of joy, by intimate personal language, and by an assertion that there has always been a change from judgment to salvation.”<sup>43</sup>

Deutero-Isaiah is most famous for his ‘servant-songs’ and much speculation has occurred concerning the identity of the Servant that is so powerfully described in poetry. Ralph Klein suggests that it is important to consider the significance and importance given to the role of the servant in that period.<sup>44</sup> Was it the prophet himself? Was it the people of Israel? Was it the young king Zerubbabel? I believe it is reasonable to fit all of these assumptions into the picture of the Servant. However, in contemporary interpretation, Jesus Christ is seen as the most logical person to have embodied all of the attributes of Isaiah’s servant. If, indeed, the prophet had in immediate view the people of Israel, then Jesus as the new Israel naturally follows as the Servant described in the poetry of Deutero-Isaiah.

For this prophet, the nation of Israel in exile, would realize “...Israel’s faithful endurance of exile and her victorious emergence from it were designed to make her a

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<sup>41</sup> Klein, *Israel in Exile*, 124.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

light to the nations.”<sup>45</sup> His was a vision of restoration, not primarily a physical restoration, but rather “to provide for his people the will and spirit, to be the covenanted people of God.”<sup>46</sup> Deutero-Isaiah significantly helped shape the future of Jewish faith. It was this prophet who clearly described God’s higher purpose of the servant Israel. The restoration would not be for them but rather that, “the knowledge of God’s authority over history and the sensation of his love will be lodged in the larger heart of the human race.”<sup>47</sup> This was an important theological move in that the people of Israel are again cast as having an important divine purpose in the world. And it would become an important theological perspective for Jesus to adopt and to be later assumed by the early Christian church. Raymond Foster suggests Deutero-Isaiah may have been with the group returning to Jerusalem in the company of Sheshbazzar, in part because of his emphasis on the “return” from exile.<sup>48</sup> If so, it was probably painful for him to observe the developments as they occurred during the restoration process.

Many of the Jewish leaders living in exile heeded the words of the prophets. They were mindful of the balance between prophetic judgment and hope for renewal. Over time they sought to understand the theological significance of their circumstances. And this fresh understanding can be discerned from the prolific writing that emerged out of the exilic experience.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>46</sup> Raymond Foster, *Restoration of Israel; A Study of Exile and Return*, (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1970), 66.

<sup>47</sup> Newsome, *Exodus*, 122.

<sup>48</sup> Foster, *Restoration of Israel*, 95.

## The Literature of the Exile

### *The Deuteronomistic History*

The Deuteronomistic History is the name given to the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings.<sup>49</sup> There are some scholars who believe this writer (or writers) worked in Palestine and that the works may have started before the exile but were likely finished during the exilic period.<sup>50</sup> The Deuteronomistic writer is concerned about the need for the people of Israel to be faithful to Yahweh. The experience of suffering is a direct consequence of the collective disobedience of the people.<sup>51</sup> There is a consistent theme of divine anger, “rooted in the peoples’ turning to other gods...” as noted by Fretheim.<sup>52</sup> Yet, throughout, it is clear that hope is available. God’s anger will not last forever.<sup>53</sup> It was the Deuteronomistic writer who established King David as the de facto measuring stick for all other kings who followed. This established a continuing hope through the period of exile, as long as there was a king of the Davidic line who was among them (King Jehoiachin). And this hope continued with the appointment of Zerubbabel after the restoration of the remnant to Jerusalem.<sup>54</sup> However, this writer not only emphasizes the faithfulness of the particular king, but he is also fearful that the people of each period would be no better than their king.<sup>55</sup> The writer is

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<sup>49</sup> Klein, *Israel in Exile*, 23.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24, and Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 44 and 64. However, Peter Ackroyd does not preclude the real possibility this literature also had its creation in Babylon although he does suggest it cannot be conclusively stated for either location.

<sup>51</sup> Klein, *Israel in Exile*, 26.

<sup>52</sup> Terence Fretheim, *Deuteronomistic History* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 93.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-31.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

clear that repentance is required for God to reaffirm his promises to the patriarchs.<sup>56</sup> Peter Ackroyd offers the following astute perspective of the religious purpose for the people of Israel as understood by the Deuteronomic writer:

Here is an interpretation of the whole range of the events, an understanding of the disaster in terms of divine judgment on Israel's sin, an appreciation that restoration—adumbrated but not yet realized—rests in the purpose of God to choose his people again, and for David's sake not to abandon them forever. The new community is to be created on the pattern of the old, a community which is to be a religious entity, totally in relationship to Yahweh.<sup>57</sup>

Ultimately, the Deuteronomic writers are persuaded that their God is a compassionate God; that this God will provide a deliverer “not finally because of anything which they have done or will do, but because God is moved to do so out of love.”<sup>58</sup>

### *The Priestly Writers*

Many of the priests of the Temple were among those placed in exile. Without a Temple from which to carry on their work, they had to become creative. They no doubt carried with them the earlier writings of the history of the people of Israel and of the law. As well, they may also have been influenced by the writing of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. They set about to revisit the writings in light of the exile. Significant creative additions and redactions emerged. Ralph Klein observes that: “The Priestly writing in the Pentateuch wrestles with the problems of exile through its retelling of the primeval

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>57</sup> Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 82.

<sup>58</sup> Fretheim, *Deuteronomic History*, 95.

history and of Israel's history before the conquest."<sup>59</sup> Out of this rediscovery and assessment of the history of the people of Israel emerged a new-found interest in creation, the Sabbath, circumcision, and the Law. Hope is only available if the nation in exile is able to remember its history of redemption.<sup>60</sup>

The Jews in exile remembered how God was with them in the past and how he gave them hope for the future. From revisiting the creation narrative and noticing the importance of Sabbath to Yahweh, it became apparent to them that it ought to also be important for His people.<sup>61</sup> By observing the Sabbath, the Passover, and practicing circumcision, the exiled Jews demonstrated their distinctiveness from their neighbors and in this way maintained their identity.<sup>62</sup>

A major part of the Priestly literature is the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17-26). Peter Ackroyd suggests that, "...the P narrative reaches a first climax in the Sabbath, but this is only an anticipation of the final climax which is reached in the picture of a tabernacle as the centre of a people which can best be thought of as a worshipping community rather than as a merely political entity."<sup>63</sup> The Priestly work sees failure as a consistent feature ever since the time of creation but hope comes out of the Exodus narrative—they can also be delivered from Babylon.<sup>64</sup> It seems clear that out of this exilic experience a significantly altered Jewish way of life as an organized religious community

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<sup>59</sup> Klein, *Israel in Exile*, 125.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>63</sup> Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 94.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

emerged. Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld observed that: “...exile in Babylon represented a major step toward the kind of Judaism we encounter during the time of Jesus.”<sup>65</sup>

The richness of the theological reflection undertaken by the Deuteronomic and Priestly writers offers inspiration to the contemporary church. Here was a proud nation conquered and dispersed, removed from its holy city of Jerusalem. And the Temple, the most important connection with Yahweh, was destroyed. Out of this reflection emerged a new way of understanding their past, their present circumstances and hope for restoration in the future. God would not abandon his people. So too, the contemporary church needs to reflect on its historical calling, seek to understand its present circumstances and recapture fresh hope for the exiled church of Jesus Christ. For the exiled Jews, the expectant hope was symbolized most profoundly through a physical restoration to Yehud.

### **Restoration to Yehud<sup>66</sup>**

The hoped for restoration became a reality when Cyrus, the Persian king, defeated the Babylonian kingdom. The Persians had become known for their preservation of the individual cultural and religious features of conquered peoples. Not surprising then, Cyrus issued a decree that paved the way for the first return and ordered the rebuilding of the Temple (Ezra 1:1-4). Sheshbazzar was appointed as the leader of this first group (Ezra 1:8). Yet, many stayed behind in Babylon. They were, however, encouraged to support the restoration efforts (Ezra 1:2-6). Despite the hope, the return to Palestine was not a full restoration from exile. While there was a sense of restoration, “on the political

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<sup>65</sup> Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, *The Witness of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), 83.

<sup>66</sup> Anthony J. Tomasino, *Judaism before Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 48-68. An excellent brief summary of the restoration experience.

front, never again would Judah be a state independent of foreign control (except for a brief period under the Maccabees in the second century BCE).<sup>67</sup> The returning Jews were still under the rule of the Persians and letters of permission from the Persian court were required.<sup>68</sup> The returning group considered themselves as the true remnant (because they had experienced the exile in Babylon). Daniel Smith observed that this kind of thinking is also consistent “with the social development of a group under stress.”<sup>69</sup> Conflict soon occurred between those who considered themselves to be the pure people of Yahweh (i.e. those who were exiled in Babylon) those who were left behind in Judah and the Samaritans who now also wanted to become part of the Temple restoration.<sup>70</sup>

Work on the Temple moved slowly; probably for economic reasons, and also because the people were distracted in re-building their own lives.<sup>71</sup> Raymond Foster suggests that the struggles between the Palestinian Jews and the Babylonian Jews may also have contributed to the delay.<sup>72</sup> The delay was temporarily resolved when Zerubbabel, the nephew of Jehoiachin, was appointed, adding strength to the Babylonian Jews’ theological perspective.<sup>73</sup> With additional encouragement from the prophet Haggai, work was re-commenced (Haggai 1:12). It was ultimately under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah that the re-building of the Temple and of the city walls was fully accomplished.

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<sup>67</sup> Jill Middlemas, *The Templeless Age*, 2.

<sup>68</sup> Smith-Christopher, *Theology of Exile*, 40.

<sup>69</sup> Smith, *Religion of the Landless*, 203.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>71</sup> Foster, *Restoration of Israel*, 105. This emphasis upon their personal lives and fortunes was criticized by God through the prophet Haggai (Haggai 1:4).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

During this extensive re-building period, with no king to lead them, the role of the priest became much more important. Yet, they were also still under the control of the Persians. John Bright makes the point: “The political history of the Jews throughout this period is inseparable from that of the Persian Empire, within the bounds of which virtually all of them were living, and which was, as the sixth century gave way to the fifth, reaching its greatest physical expansion.”<sup>74</sup> The authority placed with both Nehemiah and Ezra was given by the successive leadership of Persia. It was King Artaxerxes who authorized the rebuilding of the city walls in Jerusalem.<sup>75</sup>

Under the leadership of Ezra in particular, followed also by Nehemiah, keeping the law became of primary importance. This was not surprising given the admonition of the pre-exilic prophets.<sup>76</sup> Although they were subjects of Persia, they found their political cohesiveness as a community through the law and keeping the law.<sup>77</sup> John Bright observed further that: “It was this consistent stress on the law which imparted to Judaism its distinctive character.”<sup>78</sup> The post-exilic community moved easily into this new form of community that was no longer led and united by a monarch, but rather by a set of beliefs and dedication to the monotheism of Yahweh.<sup>79</sup> However, in the midst of the joy experienced by the Babylonian remnant, the historic Israel, consisting of twelve tribes, was still not a reality.

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<sup>74</sup> Bright, *History of Israel*, 372.

<sup>75</sup> Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 381.

<sup>76</sup> Bright, *History of Israel*, 430.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 390. This focus upon, and emphasis of the importance of keeping, the law continued to the time of Jesus and provided a significant theological distinctive for the Apostle Paul to argue for the post-Resurrection development of the Christian faith experience in following Jesus.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 431.

<sup>79</sup> W.J. Dumbrell, *Covenant & Creation: An Old Testament Covenantal Theology* (Exeter, Devon: The Paternoster Press, 1984), 166.

### **Re-Uniting North and South—a Failed Vision**

After the restoration to Yehud, there emerged a fresh hope for unification of the twelve original tribes of Israel. The ten northern tribes and the two southern tribes of Israel were separated long before the time of exile. The Northern kingdom called Israel, and the Southern known as Judah, each had its own king. Less is known about the Northern kingdom after the separation. However, the author of 2 Kings suggests that its failure to follow Yahweh and its persistence in following other gods would lead to its destruction (17:15). The author of 2 Kings states succinctly that it was because of their sin and unfaithfulness (17:7-23). “Therefore the Lord...gave them into the hands of plunderers, until he thrust them from his presence” (17:20). The Northern kingdom fell to the Assyrians several decades prior to the exile of Judah. While the Scriptures describe how its people were carried away, there is little additional information about its exilic experience.

Nevertheless, the Jews of the Northern kingdom still venerated the city of Jerusalem and the Holy Temple located in that city.<sup>80</sup> Among the Babylonian exiles, perhaps because of the increasing prominence of the priests and the reclamation of the distinctiveness of the Jewish people, there grew among this exiled group the sentiment that only the Babylonian Jews held the pure way of Yahweh. Both Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah spoke out against this view.<sup>81</sup> Yet it is evident that this perspective persisted after

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<sup>80</sup> There is evidence for this from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah which indicate the Samaritans of the northern kingdom were interested in participating in the rebuilding of the Temple.

<sup>81</sup> Foster, *Restoration of Israel*, 113, and E.W. Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles: A Study of the Prose Tradition* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970), 129.

the first group of Babylon exiles were restored to Judah.<sup>82</sup> This perspective was reinforced by Ezra, Nehemiah and Haggai.<sup>83</sup> Those who were left behind in Judah and the Samaritan Jews of the former Northern kingdom were rejected as unworthy of participating in the restored community in Jerusalem. This was because of their failure to only worship the God of Israel, choosing instead to worship other gods (2 Kings 17:24).<sup>84</sup>

This view of the Samaritans was reinforced by Ezra during his attempts at purification of the restored community (Ezra 9-10). It was only through such drastic measures of segregating the returning exiles, including giving up foreign wives, that some semblance of order among the post-exilic community could be restored. This was at odds with the vision of Deutero-Isaiah who saw a unified community led by the Servant.<sup>85</sup> However, the role of the High Priest and the priestly class dominated and the form of Judaism developed out of Babylon and reinforced during the restoration period would prevail. The Samaritans were and continued to be a shunned people group as is evident from the parable of the Good Samaritan taught by Jesus (Luke 10: 30-37). It was Jesus who symbolically united all twelve tribes through his appointment of twelve disciples.<sup>86</sup> Raymond Foster concludes that, “in a real sense, the Story of Jesus is the continuing story of Israel’s reformation.” That reformation could not occur in the post-exilic restoration to Palestine and waited for fulfillment in Jesus.

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<sup>82</sup> Foster, *Restoration of Israel*, 110-122.

<sup>83</sup> Daniel Smith makes the important point that it may be difficult for us in our present context to understand why Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and others would take such a strong position against those who were not part of the Babylonian exile. “We are invited to look at Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, and others from an “exilic consciousness” from the perspective of their worries and experiences....” Daniel Smith, *The Religion of the Landless*, 197.

<sup>84</sup> Foster, *Restoration of Israel*, 110.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>86</sup> Garry Wills, *What the Gospels Meant* (New York: Viking Press, 2008), 35.

### **Connection between Judaism of the Restoration and Christianity**

John Bright continues the argument for a delayed restoration, observing that “...Israel’s history leads straight to the Talmud—or the gospel.”<sup>87</sup> It was during the exile that, at the bidding of the prophets, the people of Israel were able to re-focus their attention on God’s purpose for them, to reflect theologically on their connection with Yahweh and their role within the world among the nations.<sup>88</sup> Jeremiah writes of this new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34. William Dumbrell interprets this as a covenant “to transition from Israel as a nation to Israel as a theological ideal.”<sup>89</sup> This theological ideal is then created ultimately through Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection.<sup>90</sup>

The literature that came out of the exilic period also emphasized creation theology. There was a new creation emerging as part of what God was doing through the exilic experience and in the reformation of the people of Israel as a theological ideal. This ideal is perhaps most graphically illustrated in the Servant Songs of Second Isaiah. Israel itself was to be that servant, theologically speaking. The ultimate servant then was fully realized in Christ as he inaugurated the church to be the new Israel and, therefore, the new servant. This became clear in the teaching of Jesus; “the New Covenant would operate fully only in the end-time age or the eschaton.”<sup>91</sup> Therefore, could it be that the church will continue to be at its strongest when in exile?

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<sup>87</sup> Bright, *History of Israel*, 464.

<sup>88</sup> Dumbrell, *Covenant & Creation*, 173.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

### Reconciling the “exilic period” with the “temple-less age”<sup>92</sup>

As noted above, there has been a considerable amount of interest in seeing the late Modern period church as being in a place of exile. This imagery draws upon the numerous scholarly works that focus attention on the exilic experience of the people of Judah concurrent with and following the Babylonian destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the Temple. More recently, Jill Middlemas has questioned the appropriateness of the term “exile” for the Jewish experience. She argues that this exilic experience was not universal even though it has most direct application to those who were taken to Babylon. From the biblical record itself, it is clear that many Jews remained in Judah. Others fled to different locations including Egypt.<sup>93</sup>

Clearly, if the term “exile” is intended to only refer to a geographical exile identified by a forced displacement from a homeland, then only the Babylonian exile would qualify. However, the exilic experience has often been extended to the wider displacement of the Jewish people from both the Northern kingdom of Israel and Southern kingdom of Judah, though the biblical record gives higher priority to the exilic experience of Judah. Therefore, Middlemas suggests that a more appropriate term for the period beginning with the destruction of the Temple to the rebuilding of the Temple is “templeless.” In her opinion, this term more accurately describes the common experience of those exiled to Babylon, those that remained in Judah and those that fled to other

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<sup>92</sup> There are numerous texts addressing the exilic period of the people of Israel, most clearly defined by the forced deportation to Babylon. However, Jill Middlemas introduced a new term to the scholarship that finds its way into the title of her book, *The Templeless Age*.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

countries. While there seems to be great merit to her arguments, they are not without criticism.<sup>94</sup>

My own interest in this distinction is more in the symbolic value of the term. If “temple-less” is an equally valid description to “exilic,” then temple-less is a term that has great value in describing the kind of church that should transition into the postmodern era. The greatest creative period in developing the Hebrew Scriptures occurred during the temple-less age, “both recording the tragedy and confronting its challenges.”<sup>95</sup> The hope for restoration held out by the prophets of the exile was that the Temple would be restored. The reconstruction of the Temple following the return from Babylon to Jerusalem symbolically ended the exilic period. However, the rebuilding of the Temple did not produce the desired sense of restoration. And by the time of Jesus, it became a place entirely incompatible with God’s vision for the Temple, as Jesus declared while cleansing the Temple (Matt. 21:12-13). However, the theological understanding that God could relate to his people without the presence of the Temple was developed much earlier by the Priestly writers.

### **From Tabernacle to Synagogue to Homes**

One of the significant achievements emerging from the exilic and temple-less era, marked by the Babylonian exile, was the development of the synagogue. This new form of worship space was most probably inspired by the Tabernacle, built by the people of

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<sup>94</sup> John Anderson, “Review: Middlemas, *The Templeless Age*” (Personal Blog, “Hesed we ‘emet,” entry posted July 30, 2009) <http://hesedweemet.wordpress.com/2009/07/30/review-middlemas-the-templeless-age/#comments> (accessed January 1, 2012) and Charles Halton, “Review: *The Templeless Age*,” Personal Blog, “Field Forward Thinking: Bible and Ancient Near East,” entry posted February 27, 2009), <http://awilum.com/?p=838> (accessed January 1, 2012).

<sup>95</sup> Middlemas, *Templeless Age*, 26.

Israel wandering through the desert of Sinai, under the specific instructions of Yahweh.<sup>96</sup> A sense of the new understanding of where Yahweh is present is found at Ezekiel 11: 16. The Lord says to Ezekiel, “Although I sent them far away among the nations and scattered them among the countries, yet for a little while I have been a sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone.” From this passage there is a sense that the Jewish exiles experienced the Lord’s presence far from Jerusalem and the Temple. Jonathan Sacks observed that: “The synagogue became...the ultimate expression of monotheism—that wherever we gather to turn our hearts toward heaven, there the Divine presence can be found, for God is everywhere.”<sup>97</sup>

The story of the Tabernacle itself is a significant demonstration of the development of a monotheistic belief and the relationship that the people of Israel had with Yahweh. There are several important facts tied to the Tabernacle that should be considered. First, that instruction to build the Tabernacle came immediately after Israel built and worshiped a golden calf. As such, the Tabernacle began a period of restoration of the relationship with Yahweh, which was severely tarnished by Israel’s disobedience and subsequent idolatry.<sup>98</sup> Second, that God told Moses that funding for the Tabernacle would be voluntary. “You are to receive the offering for me from each man whose heart prompts him to give.” (Exodus 25:2).

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<sup>96</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant & Conversation: A Weekly Reading of the Jewish Bible* .(Jerusalem: Maggid Books & The Orthodox Union, 2010), 190. See also Exodus 25:9. “Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.”

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>98</sup> R. Larry Shelton, *Cross & Covenant: Interpreting the Atonement for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Mission* (Tyrone, GA: Paternoster, 2006) 51-80. Restoration of the relationship was essentially and importantly a renewal of the covenant between God and his people.

There is also a connection between the Tabernacle story and the creation story. God gave explicit instructions for the construction of the Tabernacle. He advised Moses to “have them make...” (Exodus: 25:8). Thus, the people were involved in the creative process. The Jewish translation that Jonathan Sacks quotes in his book, reads “They shall make a Sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell *in* them” (my emphasis). The translations used by Protestant Christians, including the NIV translation used throughout this paper, all say “dwell among them.” The Jewish translation that Rabbi Sacks uses provides an interesting relational perspective, making “dwell” very personal. He describes the emerging understanding: “...the Divine Presence lives not in a building but in its builders; not in a physical place but in the human heart.”<sup>99</sup> Although Sacks draws inspiration from this passage for a Jewish audience, the truth of this relational understanding was ultimately clear for Christians following the resurrection of Christ. The Apostle Paul expresses the relationship with God and the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in several places.<sup>100</sup> Another important relationship between this story and our theme is the connection between the Tabernacle and holiness. Jonathan Sacks suggests that: “The meaning of the Tabernacle....is that God lives wherever we subordinate our will to His.” He then connects this with the call upon Israel to be a holy nation, noting: “*Holiness is the space we make for God.*”<sup>101</sup> This sense of “making space” or submitting our will to God’s will is consistent with the submission Jesus exhibited throughout his life; its effect being so fully expressed on Holy Saturday. It is the perspective that I believe is so

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>100</sup> See, 1 Cor. 3:16, 1 Cor. 6:19, 2 Cor. 6:16, and Ro 8:19.

<sup>101</sup> Sacks, *Covenant & Conversation* 142.

important for the leadership of the late modern Christian church. They must totally submit their lives and leadership to Christ.

The Temple in Jerusalem and the synagogues built in many cities, continued to be important to the development of the early church. But after the Gentiles joined this emerging faith, early Christians began meeting and worshipping in homes. The book of Acts concludes with Paul receiving visitors and preaching from his rented home in the city of Rome (Acts 28:30-31).

The theological development of God's relationship with his people from Tabernacle to Temple, from synagogue to homes exemplifies the importance of reading the New Testament with the Old. It is only possible to understand the significance of the death and resurrection of Christ in the context of Old Testament story. Therefore, the premise of this dissertation is that the contemporary church must first go back to the biblical exile to understand how it should respond to its current context in the late modern era. The contemporary church must also reflect upon and consider its appropriate response to exile. In this respect, the response of the Jewish people to their unwelcome circumstances is instructive.

### **Comparing the Response of the Church to that of the Exiled People of Judah**

The most important challenge for the contemporary Twenty-First Century church is to accept that it is in a place of exile from its cultural context. The exiled Jews knew they were exiled either because they were physically displaced or they were under the rule of a foreign country. The exilic experience of the contemporary church is more

subtle; it is a loss of its identity.<sup>102</sup> Smith-Christopher observed, correctly, that “much of the present identity crisis boils down to a loss of power and influence—a loss of moral power because of a history of compromise, and thus a loss of authority behind most attempts at persuasion.”<sup>103</sup> The response of the church to the symptoms of exile (even though the church generally may not perceive itself in exile) has mirrored in many ways the response of those placed in exile so many years ago. There is denial, anger, blame, angst, accommodation, withdrawal and separation, and persistent attempts to retain a position of influence and power.

Drawing upon the exilic experience of the people of Israel, Walter Brueggemann offers insight for the church today. He recognized a powerful connection between “Relinquishment and Receiving” as proclaimed by the three great prophets of the Babylonian exile.<sup>104</sup> The relationship between them is present throughout Israel’s history, but most powerfully during its exile to Babylon. And the transition from relinquishment to receiving is required for any significant change. Otto Scharmer, writing to a secular audience, described this transition as, “letting go and letting come.”<sup>105</sup> In order for something new to be received by the church, the old must die. In order for the exilic

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<sup>102</sup> Martin B. Copenhaver, Anthony B. Robinson and William H. Willimon, *Good News in Exile* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 2. Smith-Christopher adds the point that “the present reality is an exile even if there is not much awareness of this exilic circumstance.” Smith-Christopher, *Theology of Exile*, 191 and Frost, *Exiles*, 2-27.

<sup>103</sup> Smith-Christopher, *Theology of Exile*, 191.

<sup>104</sup> Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 4-7.

<sup>105</sup> C. Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Future as it Emerges* (Cambridge: Sol, 2007), 184-199. The picture which Scharmer provides is of the “U” with the left side of the U being the side of letting go (surrendering) and the right side shows the letting come — allowing the future to lead. At the bottom of the U is the transition phase — which he describes as *presencing* — when one allows the future to lead and the new to be received.

experience to be a learning transitional experience, present and ancient attitudes and ethos that shaped the church must be relinquished.

The challenges facing the contemporary church to balance between relinquishment and receiving can be gleaned from the Babylonian experience. The prophet Ezekiel began his teaching before the final destruction of the city of Jerusalem, and more importantly, when the Temple was still standing. It would be five years before total destruction and devastation occurred. The first twenty-four chapters of Ezekiel are all about “relinquishment, probably written before the fall in 587.”<sup>106</sup> Ezekiel’s words are not gentle to the Jews of Jerusalem and Judah. The words are powerful and elaborate images that are designed to be a strong warning and condemnation. There are vivid images of destruction and desolation. Flowing out of Ezekiel’s vision of God’s holiness, he makes clear that Yahweh is not to be trifled with. Idolatry is condemned (Ezek 8-9). Words alone are not adequate for a message this urgent. So Ezekiel employs strong visions and physical enactments, utilized to bring home the serious nature of his message. Yet the people and the King failed to heed the warning. By comparison, the contemporary church must also gain a clear understanding of what must be relinquished in order to receive a new perspective; a new way of life and ministry.

Ezekiel’s message is balanced between relinquishment and receiving. The last chapters of Ezekiel are about hope, about receiving the new, even in exile. There is hope for new life for the dry bones, but it is a dangerous hope.<sup>107</sup> He leaves the Israelites with an expectation for holiness and righteousness. New skin and new tendons are not enough (Ezek 38:8). By analogy, programmatic change for the church—new buildings, new

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<sup>106</sup> Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 52.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

technology, new music, extra parking, slick technology and presentation, even a wonderful web presence—are not enough for transformation to occur. The Breath of God is necessary for new life to emerge (Gen. 2:7; John 20:10). The breath of the Spirit is required (Ezek. 38:14). It is that which empowers all things, even the gospel; “The gospel is more than good advice...it has authority...because of its source.”<sup>108</sup>

One of the most pervasive responses to exile (as it was for a certain segment of the exiled Jews) is that of accommodation. For the church, this form of response has led to development of a “civic faith.”<sup>109</sup> A civic faith comes from a combination of a strong commitment to the old vision of the church and comfortably blending with the surrounding culture. This is a “feel-good” form of religious experience. Preaching draws more from psychology and current views of society employs Scripture to validate the point. “In the syncretistic church the distinguishing attributes of the gospel are blended with the prevailing worldview, morality, and behavior of the dominant culture so that Christianity loses its distinct voice in the culture it is trying to influence and shape.”<sup>110</sup> There is no dangerous challenge. There is no risk-taking. Maintaining the past is norm. Christianity is identified with its buildings more than its people, their lifestyles and actions.

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<sup>108</sup> Copenhaver, Robinson, and Willimon, *Good News*, 10.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>110</sup> Darrin Patrick and Matt Carter, with Joel A. Lindsey, *For the City: Proclaiming and Living out the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 77. I only take issue with the last word of the authors’ suggestion. I don’t believe it is the purpose of the church to “shape” the culture and impossible to do from an exilic perspective. I agree with Craig A. Carter when he suggests the goal of the church “is not to transform society, but to witness to the truth that, in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, the world has *already* been transformed.” Craig A. Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture: A Post-Christendom Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 26.

It's a lifeless kind of faith, like the dry bones of Ezekiel's vision (Ezek. 37).

Lifeless faith requires deception. Brueggemann describes the cover-up: "There is a kind of conspiracy of deception that keeps the dominant values of our culture credible."<sup>111</sup> But there is hope for new life in the dry bones, even in exile. However, it is important for the exilic church to heed the warning of Daniel Smith-Christopher, "...to be on guard lest a genuine exilic theology decompose into a temporarily faddish 'tourist' theology."<sup>112</sup> It is so easy for this to become yet another program for self-preservation rather than a genuine transformation of the ethos of the community.

Relinquishing the old and receiving the new is still difficult. It was for the exilic Jews and continues to be for the contemporary church. The Priestly writers and the Deuteronomist tradition constantly reminded the Jewish people to remember their history in order to prepare for the relinquishment process. They were asked to remember who they were and who they belonged to. They were reminded of what God did in delivering them out of Egypt. They remembered the great traditions that came out of that deliverance experience. They were reminded of the distinctive observances that set them apart—the Sabbath, circumcision, and the law. They were to be holy and righteous. Their God was a jealous God and would not tolerate idolatry.

Even though Jeremiah urged them to pursue full lives in Babylon, they were not to be assimilated into or to accommodate Babylonian values. The church must "pay attention to maintaining its differences from the surrounding society toward which both its mission and prophetic judgment must be directed..."<sup>113</sup> There can be no liberation if

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<sup>111</sup> Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 28.

<sup>112</sup> Smith-Christopher, *Theology of Exile*, 196.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

“no peoplehood has been formed.”<sup>114</sup> Even though the Jews in Babylon were not a separate nation, they maintained their separate identity. They maintained their songs, sense of history, and their distinctive calling as God’s people.<sup>115</sup> Diana Butler Bass, in her advice to mainline congregations, suggests that “...the more intentional a congregation is about its story (and the more honest, authentic, and coherent as well), the more likely it is to be a place of vital transforming and practice.”<sup>116</sup>

The three great prophets of the exile did not just speak words. They lived out the words, sometimes quite radically. Michael Frost builds on this example, urging the exiled church: “This will take not only our words, but also our actions, our radical lifestyles.”<sup>117</sup> It is important to remember that exiles are still fully engaged with the community. “Exiles can be creative master strategists and often dedicated students of the realities of the world.”<sup>118</sup> The prophet Daniel is a good example of that potential. Although he had entered the King’s service, he “resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine...” (Dan. 1:8).

This exilic experience (the space where relinquishment opens space for reception) is important for the church but also important for its leaders. Jeremiah had the difficult task of preparing the people of Israel to let go of their religious life in the Temple, political life under a King and their national life as a sovereign Kingdom. But he also went through a ‘relinquishing’ experience. God also called him to give up the “safe

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<sup>114</sup> John Yoder, “Exodus and Exile: The Two Faces of Liberation,” *Cross Currents* (Fall 1973), 303.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 303-305. See John Yoder’s helpful discussion on this point.

<sup>116</sup> Butler Bass, *Practicing Congregations*, 97.

<sup>117</sup> Frost, *Exiles*, 19.

<sup>118</sup> Smith-Christopher, *Theology of Exile*, 192.

places” of his life.<sup>119</sup> Not surprisingly, given the context of his ministry and the toughness of his message, he faced extreme challenges, imprisonment and separation. Ezekiel experienced great challenges as well. He was required to lose his wife, whom he loved—“the delight of his eyes”—to symbolize the loss of the Temple (Ezek. 24:15-27). He suffered physically. Prophesying was more than just words for this prophet. His prophecies were experienced and lived out. This will be the great challenge for leaders of the church in exile. Following Jesus into exile will not necessarily be easy, especially moving beyond knowledge to the experiential.

Diana Butler Bass, who has made a career of studying churches, reports that in her experience it is usually only after a “near-death experience” in congregations that a re-imagining of the ethos of the church community can occur.<sup>120</sup> She writes that: “The ability to give up or surrender their received notions of church-as-institution provided a kind of spiritual entry point into creating new patterns of being church.”<sup>121</sup> For many churches, it will require an intentional movement into that place of exile; an acknowledgement of the death of the original call upon that church. Brueggemann and Frost both suggest this will require creative and courageous leadership and imaginative and dangerous storytelling.<sup>122</sup> And as Butler Bass suggests, leaders must be more than

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<sup>119</sup> Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 52.

<sup>120</sup> Butler Bass, *Practicing Congregations*, 99.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>122</sup> Both Brueggemann and Frost discuss the danger of the storytelling that is required for leaders in the postmodern church. Frost builds upon the Brueggemann themes of “dangerous memories, dangerous promises, dangerous critique and dangerous songs” as the primary context for his book titled *Exiles*. See *Exiles*, 10-11. Certainly, this was the experience of the Old Testament prophets and the early church leaders. Jesus did not promise comfort for his followers but predicted the challenges they would experience.

storytellers, they need to “...*embody* those stories.”<sup>123</sup> The prophet Ezekiel provides powerful (although somewhat extreme) examples for such embodiment.

If the contemporary Western church is to learn from the Jewish exilic experience, the words of Jeremiah to the exiled community must be taken to heart by the exiled Christian church. His advice for living within the Babylonian community is a picture of the future incarnation of Jesus. Frost puts it well; “The incarnation demands that we neither retreat into a holier-than-thou Christian ghetto nor give ourselves to the values of secular culture.”<sup>124</sup>

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks is the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregation of Great Britain and the Commonwealth, and a prolific author. His book, *Future Tense: Jews, Judaism, and Israel in the Twenty-First Century*, presents an urgent invitation to those of the Jewish faith to reclaim the calling upon the people of Israel in the Mosaic covenant. He writes, “...if religious Jews are not admired for their work with the poor, the lonely and the vulnerable, if Judaism is not the voice of justice and compassion, then something is wrong in the soul of Israel.”<sup>125</sup> These words can also be said of the contemporary Christian church. So often, the image the church presents is the opposite of that described by Rabbi Sacks as it focuses on the sacred without regard to the secular.

Gradually, over the past several decades, there has been a widespread separation between the sacred and the secular. Christians often confine their religious life to the Sunday worship experience and perhaps the midweek small group. In recent years there

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<sup>123</sup> Butler Bass, *Practicing Congregations*, 99.

<sup>124</sup> Frost, *Exiles*, 15.

<sup>125</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *Future Tense: Jews, Judaism, and Israel in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Schocken Books, 2009), 178.

has been a growing chorus in the Christian community urging integration between the sacred and secular. Rabbi Sacks has the same message for Jews: “We need a new generation of Jews, committed to the dialogue between sacred and secular if Judaism is to engage with the world and its challenges.”<sup>126</sup> On this point, Rabbi Sacks makes this additional important observation: “A Judaism divorced from society will be a Judaism unable to influence society.”<sup>127</sup> The same is true for the Christian church. It must be engaged with local communities. It cannot hope to be an effective witness to the gospel if it is not engaged fully with the issues of the poor, the lonely and the marginalized—not because this is itself the gospel message but rather that the gospel of Jesus calls Christians to follow him in this work as part of the covenantal relationship.

### **Repentance and Covenantal Relationship**

After the exiled Jews had been restored to Palestine, it was the prophet Zechariah who urged the restored community that they must repent in order for the covenant to be restored.<sup>128</sup> This theme of repentance, found throughout the Old Testament, occurs again in the New Testament. The ministry of John the Baptist was all about repentance, urging his listeners to: “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near” (Matt. 3: 2). Jesus too urged repentance on many occasions (Matt. 4:17; 11: 20-21; Luke 5:32). And repentance is still very important for the contemporary church. As Mark Boda suggests perceptively, the call to repentance “reminds those who have entered into covenant relationship that they

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>128</sup> Mark J. Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 181.

should live a life of repentance, turning to God in relationship and forsaking all affections and actions that threaten that relationship.”<sup>129</sup> So repentance continues to be an important aspect of restoring the covenant relationship with God. It is a relational issue.<sup>130</sup> Because of sin, that relationship requires continual restoration through repentance.

### **The Relationship between the Church and Culture**

Before concluding this chapter, it is important to say a few words about the relationship between the church and contemporary culture in the context of the biblical exile and the teachings of Jesus. This is an immense topic on its own and only superficial comments will be made here. In Christian literature the church’s role is often typified as one that “influences,” or “speaks into,” or “critiques” the culture. Sometimes stronger words are used such as “to shape” or “to transform” the culture.

The subject of the relationship between Christ, the Church and culture was addressed by H. Richard Niebuhr, more than six decades ago, in his highly influential book, *Christ and Culture*.<sup>131</sup> More recently, Craig A Carter published *Rethinking Christ and Culture: A Post-Christendom Perspective*, a persuasive and respectful response to Niebuhr’s work.<sup>132</sup> Carter argues that Niebuhr’s perspective presupposes that the church exists within a Christendom context and must now be re-examined.<sup>133</sup>

Within the post-Christendom context of the early twenty-first century there has been a significant paradigm shift. The contemporary culture is influenced less by

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>131</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1951).

<sup>132</sup> Craig A. Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture*.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 14-18.

Christian principles and gradually more by secular influences. Yet there is much of contemporary culture that can be supported and encouraged by the church.<sup>134</sup> However, the church must retain its ability to respond to and critique aspects of culture that do not align with the teachings of Jesus. In this respect, the church should be mindful that it not accommodate or adopt the persuasive aspects of culture such as materialism, greed, and immorality.

As noted earlier, the church must retain its counter-cultural perspective. Carter makes the important point that Christ has already transformed the world through his death and resurrection and the church is called to witness to this reality.<sup>135</sup> The gospel message declares that this reality is not yet fully consummated and awaits the return of Christ (1 Cor. 15: 24-28). The issue is still how the church is best positioned to act as this witness. Carter suggests, “The church must accept its new situation as a minority subculture within a pluralistic world with grace and quiet confidence.”<sup>136</sup> It is submitted that the church is best able to carry out its mission by adopting an exilic and temple-less perspective, fully submitted in its covenantal relationship with Jesus Christ. From that perspective, it is able to remain distinct from the world.<sup>137</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The Old Testament description of the exiled and temple-less people of Israel, their response to exile and the re-imagination of the Jewish faith and relationship with God,

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 161.

provides significant inspiration for the exiled church of the early twenty-first century. It was a continuing story of releasing the old and allowing the new to be received, an important lesson for the contemporary church. It was also a time of enormous creativity and reflection on calling, notably without the Temple to hold their focus, also important encouragement for the postmodern church. And courageous leadership kept God's vision for Israel clearly before the people. However, it remains important to also examine how this story unfolds through the birth of Jesus and the inauguration of the early church, as told in the New Testament, to which we now turn.

## CHAPTER 4

## TRANSITION: FROM BABYLONIAN EXILE TO THE EARLY CHURCH

**Jesus as Fulfillment of Messianic Prophecy<sup>1</sup>**

The ‘journey’ of the Mosaic Covenant, first delivered by God to Moses (Exodus 19:5-6) and accepted by the people of Israel, to the adoption by Peter of some of its key words for the early church (1 Peter 2:9-10), has been a key theological issue facing Christian theologians. At the time of Peter’s writing, it is believed the early church comprised both Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> Peter described the early followers of Jesus as “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession” (1 Peter 2:9). These words are remarkably similar to those received by Moses from God for the people of Israel. However the covenant given to Moses was conditional with the words: “if you obey me fully and keep my covenant” (Exodus 19: 5). The Israelites had promised to obey but had failed. There were no similar conditional words used by Peter. The conditions had been accomplished. The purpose of the calling cited by Peter was so “that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9). This was a gift from God for his glory. The response to receiving the gift was to be praise. That praise was also to be expressed in a

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<sup>1</sup> In making this statement, I am not suggesting Jesus sought to displace the role of Israel, but rather to see his life and teaching (and eventually his death) as a continuation of and symbolic restoration from exile.

<sup>2</sup> Reinhard Feldmeier, *The First Letter of Peter: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, trans. Peter H. Davids, (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2008), 42. Feldmeier suggests, however, that the audience is primarily Gentile. John Elliott suggest the audience “was mixed, consisting of both former Jews and non-Jews with a preponderance of the latter.” See John H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 65. There are differences between the assumptions of the audience used by the writer of James and the writer of Peter. The writer of James also uses language of “dispersion,” but addresses his letter to “the twelve tribes,” (James 1:1) which has been assumed to mean a primarily Jewish audience.

life that incarnates the life of Christ, his obedience, and his holiness.<sup>3</sup> Even though the early followers of Jesus were living in exile, dispersed, suffering hardship, the words of Peter gave them glorious hope.

How did the transition of the covenant from its origin in Judaism to early Christianity, occur theologically? What role did Jesus play in this transition? And, how did Jesus view his role? These are questions to be further explored, beginning with the life and work of Jesus.

Mathew begins his gospel providing a genealogy of Jesus Christ. In that genealogy he, notes the exile to Babylon. In fact, his genealogy is separated into three phases with the third being “after the exile to Babylon” (Matt. 1:12). The gospel writer concludes his genealogy by connecting the third period from the second as being “from the exile to the Christ” (Matt. 1:17).

At the outset, it is important to acknowledge the full divinity/humanity of Jesus and a predisposition toward the things of God as they relate to Israel. N.T. Wright makes this important point suggesting that, “we should be prepared to give up the false historical modesty that has made so many scholars shy of attributing theological thinking to Jesus himself.”<sup>4</sup> We can conclude that Jesus was a student of Scripture, and well aware of the teachings of the Prophets, the continuing exile of the people of Israel, and the anticipation and expectation of a Messiah. In the minds of others, this expectation was in the nature of a revolution, an overturning of the prevailing powers. However, Wright points out that,

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<sup>3</sup> R. Larry Shelton, *Cross & Covenant: Interpreting the Atonement for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Mission* (Tyrone GA: Paternoster, 2006), 222.

<sup>4</sup> N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 478.

“Jesus was summoning his hearers to the real revolution, which would come about through Israel reflecting the generous love of YHWH into the whole world.”<sup>5</sup>

This grand vision was shared by John the Baptist. Scot McKnight suggests: “Both John and Jesus had a single vision for their contemporary Israel, and that was for Israel to become what God had called it to be.”<sup>6</sup> The writer of the Gospel of Luke draws the clear connection between the prophecy of Isaiah and the calling of John the Baptist (Luke 3:4). And John the Baptist echoed the requirement for justice and care for the poor (Luke 3:10-14). This calling upon Israel was the prevailing theme of earlier prophets, and the failure to observe them resulted in the exile Israel experienced for so many centuries. Late in the exilic experience, it was Second Isaiah who captured the image of the required vision for Israel in his description of the Servant.

There is a natural inclination to connect the Servant songs of Isaiah with the life and death of Jesus. The Apostle Paul appears to be familiar with and uses language from Isaiah as, in reference to Jesus, he provides the image of the Isaianic servant (Romans 4:25; Isaiah 53:4, 5).<sup>7</sup> Thus, the link is made shortly after the death of Jesus. Although the early church clearly draws upon the Servant of Isaiah as the prophetic inspiration for the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, did Jesus himself have that same self-understanding? Joseph Blenkinsopp holds the opinion that there can be little doubt of this self-understanding.<sup>8</sup> The words of Jesus found at Luke 4:17-21, provide a clear example that

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 507.

<sup>6</sup> Scot McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel: The Teachings of Jesus in National Context* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Opening the Sealed Book: Interpretations of the Book of Isaiah in Late Antiquity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 285-289.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 289.

he understood his role in fulfillment of prophecy. If so, how did Jesus begin to live out that role and what did that look like to his followers? The two leading prophets of exile, Second Isaiah and Ezekiel, both spoke of restoration. The key aspect of the Servant's anticipated leadership was restoration from exile. Yet this hope was still elusive for the Jews at the time that Jesus began his ministry. How would he inaugurate the hoped for restoration?

Restoration from exile is first symbolically found in the table fellowship practiced by Jesus. An important feature of this practice was eating with sinners. This common practice of Jesus "anticipated and made clear the arrival of the kingdom and its inclusive, gracious nature."<sup>9</sup> Two examples from the Old Testament provide an historical foundation for the practice. When the exiled King Jehoiachin was restored, he dined at the table of the King of Babylon (2 Kings 25: 27-30).<sup>10</sup> In the book of Esther, the festival of Purim is celebrated to commemorate the release of the Jews in Persia (Esther 9:18-32).<sup>11</sup> The restoration symbolism is then continued with the final meal held by Jesus with his disciples, which he urged his followers to continue to celebrate in his memory. Scot McKnight suggests that, "In Jesus' context this actualized the hope of an end to exile and a reversal of Israel's fortunes."<sup>12</sup> McKnight continues: "Undergirding Jesus' call to Israel was his vision of the kingdom of God, the term he chose to express the end of Israel's self-imposed exile and the fulfillment of Israel's hopes."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> McKnight, *A New Vision*, 47.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

N.T. Wright also draws a direct connection between the vision Jesus had for his ministry and that of the exiled Israel. “Jesus, then, believed himself to be the focal point of the people of YHWH, the returned-from-exile people, the people of the renewed covenant, the people whose sins were now to be forgiven.”<sup>14</sup> That connection is important for the message of Jesus to the Jews of Palestine. They were still under Roman rule. Therefore they were still, as a nation, in a state of political exile. Continuing in political exile meant that the sins of the nation (which had led to the exile), were still not forgiven. This forgiveness of a nation’s sins was an important element of how Jesus saw his life and work.<sup>15</sup>

I do not believe that Jesus saw his role as displacing the calling of the people of Israel to be a light unto the world. In fact his ministry was primarily to the Jews. His life, death and resurrection did, however, open the door to expanding this calling to Gentiles. I will expand upon this more in the next section. So when Rabbi Sacks urges the Jewish people of today to recapture a vision of the original Mosaic covenant, this reminder ought to be an important message for the Jewish people.<sup>16</sup> Sacks concluded his hopeful book with these words: “And the Jewish task remains: to be the voice of hope in an age of fear, the counter voice in the conversation of humankind.”<sup>17</sup> Despite the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, the Jewish people continue to be dispersed and living in a geographical exile. While the calling of the Jewish nation has not changed, it seems persuasive that the *elect* of the church (as described in 1 Peter), are invited into the same covenant as Israel,

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<sup>14</sup> Wright, *Victory of God*, 538.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 576-577.

<sup>16</sup> Sacks, *Future Tense*, 250-252.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

and under the same call. This *election* is a calling into exile; being chosen to follow the resurrected Christ into exile. The addition of the church does not diminish nor extinguish the original call upon the people of Israel under the Mosaic covenant. However, Jesus signals a new covenant during the Last Supper meal with his disciples saying, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26: 28). That pouring out of blood to confirm the new covenant occurred on the cross, followed by His death and separation from the Father on Holy Saturday. Later, Peter relied upon this new covenant of Jesus when issuing his call upon the early church, employing the familiar words of the Mosaic covenant. However, the new covenant—a renewal of the covenant—required that Jesus die upon the cross and remain separated from the Father on the day referred to as Holy Saturday.<sup>18</sup>

### **Holy Saturday: The Consequence of Ultimate Submission to the Father**

Holy Saturday—that day between the sadness of Good Friday and the triumphant and joyful Easter Sunday—is a day full of mystery. Jesus was dead. The Gospel of Matthew records the surprising events that occurred following His death—an earthquake, individuals being raised from the dead, the curtain torn in the Temple (Matt. 27:51-53). The Synoptic Gospels describe the burial of the physical body of Jesus in a rich man’s tomb (Matt. 27:59-60; Mark 15:46; Luke 23:53). But what happened on that day and on the Sabbath day following? The gospels give no account of the experience of Jesus following his death. There is a mysterious reference in 1 Peter where the writer describes Jesus as “being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and

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<sup>18</sup> Shelton, *Cross & Covenant*, 81-143. This portion of Professor Shelton’s book provides a full examination of covenant renewal through the atoning life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey..." (3:18-20).

There have been multiple interpretations of this text with significant differences of opinion on the meaning.<sup>19</sup> Peter continues this thought in Chapter 4: "For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead..." (v. 6). Peter's account of Jesus' experience after death and before the resurrection is centuries later alluded to in the Apostle's Creed where it states: "he descended into hell..."<sup>20</sup>

The crucifixion and subsequent death of Jesus are the capstone example of a life lived in submission to the Father's will. This submission is captured most poignantly in His final words, immediately prior to his death: "Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands!" (Luke 23:43 NLT). At the beginning of His ministry, his refusal to accommodate to the will of the devil began the chronology of a submitted life. In the Garden, prior to his capture, during prayer, he pleads to the Father for relief but goes on to say: "Yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). His full submission and surrender to the will of the Father continues in death on Holy Saturday to accomplish the will of the Father for the renewal of his covenant with the world. In his separation from the Father in death, Jesus is in a place of exile from the Father.

The mysterious day of Holy Saturday, when the Lord had died, has been the subject significant theological reflection over the centuries dating back to the early church fathers. The questions include: Did God suffer relationally on that Sabbath Saturday? How did the death of the Son affect the Trinitarian relationship? What are the theological implications of the Son's descent into Hell? The theological implications of Holy Saturday are beyond the scope of this paper. My interest in Holy Saturday is two-

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<sup>19</sup> Boring, *1 Peter*, 133-142.

<sup>20</sup> Apostle's Creed. <http://www.creeds.net/ancient/apostles.htm> (accessed January 31, 2011).

fold to support of the arguments presented in this paper. The first interest is to understand the implications for Christians arising from the profound submission of Jesus to the will of the Father. His words and acts of submission are seen both in the events leading to his death and in submission to death itself. The submission by Jesus to the Father provides the inspiration to his followers to also submit their life to following Jesus. The second interest is to understand the relational separation of Jesus from the Father in death as a form of exile. Jesus had already suggested to his followers that submission and separation were necessary prerequisites to following him. His words are clear: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). Taking up the cross led to death. And the invitation is “daily”. These words of Jesus must have been in the mind of Peter as he later addressed the early exiled church.

### **The Early Church in Exile as a New Israel**

The most frequently referenced description of the early church is found in Acts 2: 42-47. This passage provides insight for how the early church functioned. However, the church had yet to experience the “trials of many kinds” (James 1:2) of the decades that were before it. As a result, a more realistic picture of the church might come from a group of Jewish Christians to a largely Gentile community, as found in the epistle of 1 Peter. This letter, probably written at least twenty-five years after Peter’s famous Pentecost sermon, was delivered to a church that was dispersed and having to face the cruel reality of oppression.<sup>21</sup> Peter describes the recipients of his letter as “strangers in the world” (1:1). His letter is, in part, a wonderful expression of encouragement and hope

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<sup>21</sup> 1 Peter 1: 6. Peter describes this oppression, suggesting: ‘though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trial.’

in the faith they share in the salvation offered by Jesus Christ (1:9). But it is also an exhortation to follow Jesus, who himself lived in exile, and yet lived a life of holiness. Peter instructs them: “I urge you, as *aliens and strangers* (my emphasis) in the world, to abstain from sinful desires...” (2:11).<sup>22</sup> And yet it is his desire that this holy life is contextualized where they are living. As such, Peter urges them to be fully engaged in the broader community, submitted to secular leadership (2:13-17).

Peter may in part be speaking from the context of his own life. Douglas Harink suggests that by naming Simon *Petros*, he “is thereby rendered a stranger among his own people.”<sup>23</sup> Harink continues: “At the same time he (Peter) is made a binding sign of the existence of the church that is, not first by social or political circumstance, but by God’s election, calling, and sending, perpetually in exile, perpetually in Diaspora among the nations.”<sup>24</sup> The picture of the early church, as portrayed by the writer of 1 Peter, is that of a suffering church (1:6). “By inscribing their experience of suffering into the story of Israel’s exile, Peter not only tells them that they are not unique and that suffering must be expected; he also reminds them that their precarious existence in the world is their opportunity to know God’s gracious care.”<sup>25</sup> Harink observes that, “for Peter, *to be exiled means to be vulnerable with the vulnerability of Christ...*”<sup>26</sup> This observation concerning

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<sup>22</sup> John H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981) (1-58). For a very good discussion of the meaning of the terms the writer of 1 Peter uses for ‘resident aliens’ and ‘strangers,’ Elliott also provides a comprehensive analysis of the audience or addressees of the letter, their ethnic composition, their economic and political circumstances and their relationship with the ruling Romans, examining both the internal evidence of the text and external evidence from other sources. The writer of 1 Peter assumes some familiarity with Old Testament scriptures which suggests a Jewish audience was also being addressed.

<sup>23</sup> Douglas Harink, *1 & 2 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 28.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

vulnerability connects back to Holy Saturday, the day on which the ultimate expression of Christ's vulnerability takes place. Peter also explains that they were called into suffering, "because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps (2:21)."

Peter describes those of the church as "chosen" or "elect."<sup>27</sup> These words have inspired a theology of "election" that suggests those who are elected by God are those who are ultimately saved. This belief is one of the tenets of Classic Calvinism that only those elected by God will be saved; this by grace and not because of anything done by that person. Peter possibly alludes to an alternate position that views election as being chosen for responsibility rather than special favor. Such responsibility is a natural expectation of a covenant relationship with God.<sup>28</sup> Just as the Israelites were a chosen people with a special responsibility to those of their nation and the surrounding nations, a similar responsibility is placed on those chosen to be part of the church. It appears that a part of that responsibility is living an exilic life.<sup>29</sup> God's chosen people, his ambassadors to this world, now includes the church.

Rob Bell and Dan Golden believe that the message of 1 Peter to the nascent Christian church is applicable to the church of the twenty-first century: "The way of Jesus is the path of descent. It's about our death. It's our willingness to join the world in its

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<sup>27</sup> "To those who are the elect exiles of the dispersion ..." (1 Peter 1: 1).

<sup>28</sup> Shelton, *Cross & Covenant*, 27-28.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Wallace, "Elect Exiles," Peter Wallace personal website, <http://www.peterwallace.org/sermons/1P11.htm> (accessed September 12, 2010).

suffering, it's our participation in the new humanity, it's our weakness calling out to others in their weakness."<sup>30</sup>

One of the key themes of 1 Peter is that of "holiness." I incorporate this as an important component of Saturday leadership. This word can easily be misunderstood as it is often interpreted as "holier than thou." "Holier than thou" is incompatible within the Hebrew understanding of this word, so Peter would certainly not give it that meaning. Douglas Harink describes it this way: "Becoming holy is a matter of being transformed by, conformed to, and sharing in the prior action and character of God, and that in turn is a matter of obedience and the right orientation of desire."<sup>31</sup> It is, "...not a call to cut themselves off in irresponsible distance from their social and political context (but)...to live in ways consonant with the character of God."<sup>32</sup> Being holy requires a balance between engaging with the community while remaining distinct in following the character of God.

There is therefore an exilic element to the meaning of "holy." Holy also means being separated from and not conformed to the surrounding culture. This separation is because the culture is at odds with the character of God. Eugene Boring captures the "set apart" sense that Peter conveyed in his description of being holy. He suggests that: "To be called "holy" means that they (the early Christian church), like Israel, have been set

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<sup>30</sup> Rob Bell and Dan Golden, *Jesus Wants to Save Christians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 158.

<sup>31</sup> Harink, *1 & 2 Peter*, 55.

<sup>32</sup> Fred Craddock, *First and Second Peter and Jude* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 28.

apart for a special purpose in God's saving plan. Like Israel, they are the elect for service, not for privilege (Isa. 42:1; Amos 3:2)."<sup>33</sup>

To build the argument for holiness, Peter draws extensively upon the Old Testament to develop an exilic theology for the early church. The exilic experience, captured through so much of the OT, is foundational for the experience of the early followers of Jesus. The fact that their lifestyle and behavior was different from surrounding Hellenistic and Roman cultures, led to ostracism and suspicion.<sup>34</sup> Whereas the message of the OT was largely a corporate message, Peter fused the relationship between the responsibilities of individual followers of Christ with the community of believers.<sup>35</sup> His message is primarily to individuals. In Chapter Three, he directs comments to wives and to husbands. Later, in Chapter Five, he has a message for elders. This personalized message must have been heartwarming for the early Christians experiencing such hardship, as individuals and as families. Yet it was also necessary for Peter to explain *why* they were suffering as followers of Jesus.

In Chapter Four, Peter continues to describe the exilic reality for the followers of Jesus. He explains why their present experiences are normative for those who follow the Christ who suffered: "Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin" (4:1).

Douglas Harink captures the writer's understanding in this way:

Messianic people are called to an exilic, diasporic existence in their natural homelands. Those are not homelands defined by physical geography, but by who

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<sup>33</sup> Boring, *1 Peter*, 55.

<sup>34</sup> Peter R. Rodgers, "1 Peter," in *Theological Interpretation of the New Testament: A Book by Book Survey*, ed. Kevin J. Van Hoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Inc., 2005), 211.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

rules, and what the rules are, that is, by spiritual, political, and cultural forces and forms of life....To embrace messianic life, Peter says, is to become an exile and therefore to anticipate suffering.<sup>36</sup>

For Peter it seems that the messianic life, which is an exilic life, is also a life of suffering and an integral part of the covenant relationship and salvation offered by the death and resurrection of Christ.

Before concluding this Chapter addressing the New Testament perspective on exile, it is important to examine the Apostle Paul's teaching on this subject. Paul brought a rich understanding of the Jewish history, the exilic experience of the Jews, and of the Law, to his teaching and ministry. This enabled him to better understand the meaning and theological implications of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in its historical context.

### **The Pauline Gospel Perspective Emerging from the OT Scriptures**

The Apostle Paul importantly provided a theological bridge between the teaching of Jesus and the later exilic reality of the early church described in 1 Peter. Paul is often associated with the key doctrinal positions adopted by the church. But what was his perspective on the relationship between the life and work of Jesus and the people of Israel? Scot McKnight presents 1 Corinthians 15 as the key exhibit in his answer to this question.<sup>37</sup> The first several verses of this chapter 15 provide what have become creedal statements of the *gospel* developed from the early post-resurrection teachings of the Apostles.<sup>38</sup> In three places, Paul uses the phrase "according to the Scriptures." Richard

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<sup>36</sup> Harink, 1 & 2 Peter, 104.

<sup>37</sup> Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel: the Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 45-62.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-47.

Hays suggests: “It is highly significant that this early creed specifies that the story of Jesus’ passion and resurrection must be interpreted in light of Scripture: the earliest church understood the gospel as the continuation and fulfillment of God’s dealings with Israel.”<sup>39</sup>

It seems that Paul wanted his readers and listeners to know that this is an inherited story. He presents his argument relying upon the personal testimony of witnesses (including his own) and the historical foundation for the death and resurrection of Jesus and its meaning for the early Christians. Elsewhere he writes that he received the gospel “by revelation from Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:12). McKnight concludes that, “...the gospel for the apostle Paul is the salvation-unleashing Story of Jesus, Messiah-Lord-Son, that brings to completion the Story of Israel as found in the Scriptures of the Old Testament.”<sup>40</sup>

Paul is presenting the gospel, or good news, to the Corinthian church, offering them hope in the midst of many personal challenges. The daily reality for the apostle Paul, as shown throughout the book of Acts and the letters, was persecution, imprisonment, and beatings (see, 2 Cor. 11: 23-29). So often in his letters to the early churches, Paul must offer encouragement to stay the course and not lose sight of the great hope offered to them through the gospel. While the picture of the exilic early church is most clearly found in 1 Peter, there is ample evidence from the Pauline testimony that from its early days the church was exiled from the indigenous Jewish culture and forced to live as aliens in the Roman culture. The apostle Paul is nevertheless able to rejoice, even while writing from prison (Phil. 1:18) in the knowledge of the gospel he proclaims.

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<sup>39</sup> Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians: Interpretation A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, ed. James Luther Mays (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 255.

<sup>40</sup> McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel*, 61.

## **Conclusion**

In this Chapter, the New Testament story has been examined to draw a connection between the exilic experience of the Jews of the Old Testament and the transformative impact of Jesus on God's plan for the world. The New Testament reality for the early church meant an exilic relationship between the church and its host culture. When comparing the contemporary church and the early New Testament church, significant parallels can be seen. Today, the church is exiled in a post-Christendom, early post-modern culture. It can draw inspiration from the Old Testament exile, from the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and from the exiled and dispersed early Christian church as depicted in the New Testament. If the local church is able to learn from the exilic experiences of the people of Judah, Jesus and the early church, how does this translate for a postmodern twenty-first century local church? What does it mean for the practical day-to-day realities of the local church in its contemporary context? The answer to these questions must find their way into the everyday lives of the church and its community. This paper will now move to re-imagining the established local church drawing upon the biblical inspiration that has been described.

## CHAPTER 5

## RE-IMAGINING THE CHURCH AS EXILIC, TEMPLE-LESS, AND MISSIONAL

The key issue for the church in the early twenty-first century continues to be whether local congregations and communities of faith are seeking to fulfill the mandate given by Jesus. The question continues to be: Is the local church truly functioning as the called out community of disciples and followers of Christ, to carry on his mission of hope and redemption in the world? This can be particularly challenging for an established congregation. The leaders of a new faith community can be more intentional about shaping the ethos of the church as an exilic, temple-less, missional community. In this chapter I will explore how to re-imagine and re-vision an established congregation as a community with these characteristics—what I describe as the “Saturday church.”<sup>1</sup>

Many have warned that the ability to re-vision the established congregation is daunting. Hirsch and Frost observe that revitalizing established congregations "seems to be rare from our experience and perspective."<sup>2</sup> Leaders of change in long-established churches must be prepared for and invite chaos. William Easum points out that, "the established church that thrives mid-storm will be in continuous chaos until emerging on the other side of the storm, only to find another storm waiting."<sup>3</sup> Notwithstanding the challenges, it is incumbent upon church leaders to do everything in their power, with the

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<sup>1</sup> Many of the points will also be applicable to the newly established community of faith. The reality seems to be that very soon after a new church is established, challenges of direction and leadership emerge. Staying true to the original vision for the church requires the constant re-imagination of the community.

<sup>2</sup> Frost and Hirsch, You must read this bit first in *The Shaping of Things to Come*, x.

<sup>3</sup> William Easum, “Mid-Storm Equations for the Emerging Church,” in *The Church of the Perfect Storm*, 93.

help of the Spirit, to assist the local church to fulfill its calling. So why is it important for the local church to be a Saturday church?

### **The “Why” for the Saturday Church?**

In his influential book, *Between Cross & Resurrection*, Alan Lewis calls the church to be an Easter Saturday church.<sup>4</sup> He asks: “Are we willing to enter a historical period of death and burial, a reversal of church history on the way back to the cross?” He reminds the church that it needs to be the presence “of the incarnate, crucified, and buried Word.”<sup>5</sup> He goes on to suggest that, “Christian churches cannot aspire to be prophetic agents of renewal and reform unless they first subject themselves to the subversive judgment and radical reconstruction of the gospel of the cross and grave.”<sup>6</sup> The church must itself go through a form of death in order to enter into that Saturday experience of Jesus on Holy Saturday. Sharon Thornton makes a similar observation about the role of the church as a redemptive community: “Such a community will live the life it seeks to engender in the midst of the society it hopes to renew.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Alan Lewis, *Between Cross & Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 377. I agree with Thomas G. Weinandy when he suggests the use of the term “Easter Saturday” in this context is misleading because it misuses the term “Easter” which refers to the following day when describing what is traditionally referred to as “Holy Saturday.” There is some merit in calling the church the “Easter Saturday church.” This description is perhaps partially accurate, in that the church ought to straddle the Saturday experience between the crucifixion on Good Friday and the resurrection on Easter Sunday. See: Thomas G. Weinandy, “Easter Saturday and the Suffering of God: the Theology of Alan E. Lewis,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, Volume 5 Number 1 March 2003, 69. My own preference is to confine the description to the “Saturday Church” to provide focus for the covenantal relationship between Christ and his followers in that dark day.

<sup>5</sup> Lewis, 376.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 377.

<sup>7</sup> Sharon G. Thornton, *Broken Yet Beloved: A Pastoral Theology of the Cross* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002), 175.

This view is part of a reawakening of creation theology, of what Douglas John Hall describes as, “suffering as becoming.”<sup>8</sup> It is through the suffering servant, who died on the cross, that God restores creation through His death and the resurrection. And for the church, the presence of Jesus in our world, it means suffering for the sake of others. It also means dying to the old life of separation, and finding a new life in the Saturday experience, one encased in death. And it is only through this shared experience that renewal is possible both in the local community of faith and in the lives of those it enters into and becomes present.

This does not work from a distance. God did not restore creation from a distance but through incarnation. Christ entered into the deepest aspects of human life, including the death that all humans must face, in order for the ultimate form of restoration to occur.<sup>9</sup> The apostle Paul makes it clear that the whole world is reconciled through the death and resurrection of Christ (Colossians 1:19).<sup>10</sup> Yet the whole creation is still groaning (Romans 8:22). In the face of this continuing reality, Hans Urs von Balthasar reminds us: “yet the achieved reconciliation has need of the Church’s ministry in its service....”<sup>11</sup> The local church is involved as the present body of Christ. Von Balthasar makes the task personal in the following words: “The ministry of reconciliation of the Christian person is not merely, however, a supplication (of an impotent kind), but a (sic.)

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<sup>8</sup> Douglas John Hall, *God & Human Suffering: an Exercise in the Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 49.

<sup>9</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, trans. Aidan Nichols (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1970), 25.

<sup>10</sup> “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”

<sup>11</sup> von Balthasar, *Mysterium*, 262.

engagement of all existence even to the point of being ‘poured as a libation’ (Philippians 2, 17; II Timothy 4, 6).”<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, the Christian community so often resists following Jesus into the margins of life and seeks to “turn the church into a sanctuary and hiding place from the world.”<sup>13</sup> The transition for a community of faith to move from safety and comfort to risk and potential discomfort can be challenging. It will often feel like the Exodus wandering of the people of Israel in the wilderness. It will require leadership that is prepared to enter the Saturday experience of Jesus.

However, the local church is not exactly in the same place as the followers of Jesus on Holy Saturday. While it enters into that lonely experience with others, it holds in tension the knowledge and experience of the cross and the promise of the resurrection. It enters Saturday but holds one hand out to Friday, and the other out to the promise of Sunday.<sup>14</sup> Just as Moses reminded the Israelites of their bondage in Israel, he also kept before them the promise of God to lead them into the land of Canaan.<sup>15</sup> The great prophets of the biblical exile also held out the promise of renewal and restoration in the midst of the exilic reality of separation and loss. Before advancing further in addressing how to re-imagine the local church in this twenty-first century environment, it is important to reflect briefly on the recent journey of the church to its present place in Western society.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>13</sup> Hall, *God & Human Suffering*, 133.

<sup>14</sup> von Balthasar, *Mysterium*, 266.

<sup>15</sup> Exodus 19:4-7. Deuteronomy 29.

### **From Christendom to Post-Christendom**

The church experienced gradual change over the past one hundred years, but change began to measurably accelerate during the latter part of the twentieth century to the present. It has become clear that Canada, following the trend in Europe, has become a largely secular culture. The Province of Quebec, once a stronghold of Catholicism, is now, perhaps, the most secular province in Canada.<sup>16</sup> This drift to secularism is one example of a cultural movement away from religion. The church has been moved to the margins of society. How marginalized has the church become? There are some that suggest organizations that promote the “advancement of religion” should not be allowed to register as a Canadian charity. The argument is that such a preferential tax treatment is no longer applicable in a secular society.

The advance of secularism has led to ‘post-Christendom,’<sup>17</sup> a term that has found its way into the church vocabulary in recent years. The early Christian church—pre-Christendom—also existed on the margins of society. The host Roman Empire was so pervasive in its power that the Christian church was, by necessity, kept underground. The Christendom period is associated with the period after the Roman emperor Constantine, which gave legitimacy to the church in the Fourth-Century AD. After the church gained a prominent place in society, it also slowly gained power and influence. The early church had already adopted a leadership and organizational structure, as is clear

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<sup>16</sup> Graeme Hamilton, “Quebec’s New Secular Norm: \$144 fines for Religious Worship,” *National Post*, November, 3, 2011, <http://life.nationalpost.com/2011/11/03/quebec%E2%80%99s-new-secular-norm-fines-for-worship/> (accessed November 5, 2011). The issuance of a fine to a Quebec woman for organizing a Sunday worship gathering in rented facilities made national headlines recently.

<sup>17</sup> Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom* (London: Paternoster Press, 2004). Murray provides an excellent treatment of this subject. Murray is located in England and, therefore, provides a helpful perspective for Canadians who have followed England and the rest of Europe into post-Christendom.

from Chapter 5 of 1 Peter.<sup>18</sup> However, with the changes that Constantine ushered in, there was a subtle shift away from a self-understanding of a suffering, messianic, missional and exilic community towards a more institutionalized structure.

As the Roman Empire faded away, it was the Christian church that continued to gain power through Europe to the point that the church and state were mutually dependent. The history of the development of Europe shows the domination of the church in society and in state leadership, which was predominantly Monarchist. The period of Christendom continued, with its gradually reducing influence due to secularization, until the latter half of the twentieth century. The greatest secular effect started to be felt towards the end of the twentieth century.

Yet, from a casual and personal unscientific observation, most of the established church in Canada continues to ignore the transition to post-Christendom. Congregations still function as institutions with the prevailing assumption that they retain their place of power and influence. Prestige, buildings and bureaucracy still mark the character of a large percentage of established congregations, particularly in the mainline denominations. However, this is merely a perception, not a reality. In fact, the church is marginalized from its host culture, which has become significantly shaped by its political institutions, the entertainment industry, by large multi-national corporations and the pervasive influence of marketing.<sup>19</sup> It may be safe to say that the Enlightenment has finally defeated the church.

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<sup>18</sup> Boring, *1 Peter*, 163. Eugene Boring suggests the early church adopted leadership models “from the synagogue and general Hellenistic practice.”

<sup>19</sup> Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2004). An excellent treatment of what the current host empire can do to the effective mission of the church.

The result is that many congregations have devolved into comfortable social clubs. In many churches there is little diversity. Stephen Joubert describes it well: "churchgoers hide out in religious aquariums (churches) where everything is under control...."<sup>20</sup> For many, the church (its building, the friends one has within the community, the rituals, the Sunday worship experience, and community groups) is a kind of sanctuary that feels safe from the world. As this is not the biblical mandate for the church, how did this understanding evolve? Scholars sense that the recent change in cultural assumptions, from Modern to Postmodern, has contributed significantly to the changes that are experienced by local churches.

### **From Modernity to Postmodernity**

The movement into the post-Christendom era was accelerated by the transition from the Modern period into what is being described for now as Postmodern. One of the features of postmodernism is the general resistance to and suspicion of over-arching truth claims and large meta-narratives.<sup>21</sup> Kevin Corcoran describes this as "*philosophical post modernism*" and rightly observes that this is only one-half of the meaning of postmodernism.<sup>22</sup> He defines the other half as "*cultural postmodernism*." He describes it in this way: "If the cultural icons of modernity were the factory, industry, manufacturing,

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<sup>20</sup> Stephen Joubert, "In Sync with Jesus and the First Perfect Stormers," *The Church of the Perfect Storm*, 50.

<sup>21</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006) and John Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct? The Good News of Post-Modernism for the Church*, series ed., James K. A. Smith (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007). It is acknowledged there remain many different views on whether we are now in a postmodern period and, if so, what are the meaning and implications of postmodernism for the church and for society.

<sup>22</sup> Kevin Corcoran, "Who's Afraid of Philosophical Realism: Taking Emerging Christianity to Task," Scot McKnight, et al., *Church in the Present Tense: A Candid look at what's Emerging*, ed. Kevin Corcoran (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011), 11.

and the production of goods, then the cultural markers of postmodernism are information, new technologies,...connectivity, interdependence, decentralization, and globalization.”<sup>23</sup>

This trend is most fully experienced and adopted by the emerging generations for whom postmodernism is like the air they breathe; it is part of who they are. Those of older generations are still strongly influenced by the modern period in their attitudes and worldview.

Many local churches have been slow to awaken to the changes in culture. As part of this movement into postmodernism and post-Christendom, the church has lost its influence in society in all key areas such as morals, personal behavior, law, and politics. David Kinnaman writes: “...Christianity's image problem is not merely the perception of young outsiders. Those inside the church see it as well—especially Christians in their twenties and thirties....Mosaic and Buster Christians are skeptical of present-day Christianity.”<sup>24</sup> It is challenging for the local church to carry on ministry in this difficult "in-between period," with our proverbial feet in both periods. Many of the older members still have a modern perspective, whereas the younger members are postmodern. Addressing the differences in their desires and perceived needs in a faith community presents a significant continuing difficulty for local church leaders.

Although much has been written about the effect of postmodernism on faith and on the church, there continues to be considerable confusion. There is a sense in some circles that the church must somehow itself become more postmodern. As an example, one reads of “postmodern worship.” But this perhaps misses the point of postmodernism.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 11

<sup>24</sup> David Kinnaman, and Gabe Lyons, *unChristian*, 18. Kinnaman and Lyons elaborate by suggesting, "their vision of present-day Christianity is ... superficial, antagonistic, depressing."

Stuart Murray reminds us that: “Whatever we think of postmodernism, we inhabit postmodernity.”<sup>25</sup> Tim Condor correctly suggests that “the church’s authentic journey into emerging culture must involve transitions in both thought and practice.”<sup>26</sup> However, as he goes on to say: “postmodernism is not the point.”<sup>27</sup> It is rather a matter for the church to acknowledge that it functions within a postmodern culture. And with this awareness it is important to be mindful of the fact that attitudes and presuppositions developed during the modern era must be reconsidered. Stuart Murray makes the connection, suggesting that: “For Christianity to thrive in postmodernity, Christendom assumptions and attitudes must go.”<sup>28</sup> However, the transition into postmodernism is not the only significant challenge for the local church; there are others.

### **Other Cultural Influences**

We also live in a culture of enormous change—what is being described as discontinuous change.<sup>29</sup> While change has always been a reality, in the past it was more measured and manageable. The discontinuous change of the twenty-first century is more difficult for those of earlier generations. This is especially so because discontinuous change is both rapid and unpredictable. It is change that is not incremental. Change happens unexpectedly. In contrast, change in the past happened more slowly. It was measured, and therefore society, organizations and individuals could more readily adapt.

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<sup>25</sup> Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 13.

<sup>26</sup> Condor, *The Church in Transition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2006), 35.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>28</sup> Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 183.

<sup>29</sup> David A. Nadler, Robert B. Shaw, A. Elise Walton et al., *Discontinuous Change: Leading Organizational Transformation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994). An internet search reveals numerous references to this term “discontinuous change,” including many books and journal titles

Of course, the pervasive inroads of the internet, satellite television and smart phones have all contributed to the reality of such rapid change. And the technological advances have made the world seem small.<sup>30</sup> What happens on the other side of the world has an immediate effect on those living far away, including the local church. Life may proceed with some sense of stability for awhile and then, all of a sudden, there is a disruption half a world away. It could be a war, a natural disaster, or a financial crisis. With television and twitter the impact is known immediately. These factors now have the cumulative effect of quickening the requirement to adapt to change.

In addition to accelerating change, the advances in technology have assisted in producing growing economies and more broadly based prosperity.<sup>31</sup> As a consequence, there is no longer a felt need for religion. A growing percentage of the population feel they are getting along fine without God. The gods of materialism, comfort and individualism are winning out. In a recent study, it was found that twenty-five percent of the population, in Canada, does not believe in God.<sup>32</sup> In this regard, Canada is closer to the United Kingdom and Europe than it is to the United States which still has a much stronger Christian base.

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<sup>30</sup> Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2005). Thomas Friedman captures this in the title of his book.

<sup>31</sup> The growth in prosperity arising out of technological advances is now also most notably seen outside of the Western world, in China, Brazil, India and Russia (The “BRIC” countries). For the Western world, the recent period, from 2008 to 2011, has not felt as prosperous. The Western economies are struggling, financial markets are in a degree of disarray and unemployment levels are high. At the time of writing there is a sense that many of the economic problems are being addressed. The reality is still that the Western world is very wealthy. The future economic realities are difficult to predict at this juncture. Whether this will have any effect on the perception of the church remains to be seen but it does open many opportunities for the church to be the church it was called to be as followers of Jesus, especially with regard to those who have become economically marginalized.

<sup>32</sup> Timothy Avery, "One in Four Don't Believe in God, Poll Finds," *The Toronto Star*, Saturday, May 31, 2008, <http://www.thestar.com/News/Canada/article/434725> (accessed December 3, 2011). The same study also found that only one-third of Canadians attend church regularly.

There has also been a growing influence of those who advance atheism, with a number of recent books on the best seller list. Atheistic editorial columns are now featured in Canadian national newspapers.<sup>33</sup> All of this means, as noted earlier, that the established church is being pushed to the margins of society, much as it was during the pre-Constantine period. In Western countries, there is no overt persecution of the church but there is marginalization and disregard. But, this marginalization can also be a great opportunity for the local church to reflect and to move forward positively.

### **Perhaps Late Modern Culture is a Good Place for the Church to Be**

The present state of the culture is, arguably, positive for the church and for Christianity. Historically, the church has grown most rapidly in times of persecution. The exponential growth of the early church and the church in China are examples.<sup>34</sup> The early church saw its mandate as carrying on the mission of Jesus. This mandate is lost to a significant segment of the Western Christian church. Lesslie Newbigin was perhaps the first to awaken the church when he returned to England after spending decades in India as a missionary. What he found was a mission field in his native country. It has taken more than two decades for his message to start to sink in for the church. When Newbigin returned to England, it and the rest of Europe had already moved into the post-Christendom period, well in advance of Canada.<sup>35</sup> Newbigin urged the church to reclaim

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<sup>33</sup> At the time of writing, Mr. Hitchens has died. His death sparked a significant response in the media from all sectors — both Christian and non-Christian. It is noted there are also atheist groups that meet. See, for example, <http://www.meetup.com/cfi-bam/> (accessed January 1, 2012).

<sup>34</sup> Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 18-19 and Joubert, *In Sync With Jesus*, 48-49.

<sup>35</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 81.

its mandate, suggesting that: "...the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it."<sup>36</sup>

In his profoundly influential book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer noticed the exilic connection with Jesus, writing extensively on the way of life for the church around the world.<sup>37</sup> Bonhoeffer was writing in a European context at a time when the church was still very influential. It is only in recent years that contemporary Christian scholars and thinkers in North America are noticing the exilic relationship between following Jesus and the life of the church. This awakening is leading local churches to revisit the biblical narrative and to re-discover their true calling in exile. The common denominator, in many of the recent emerging movements within the church, is the mandate to be missional. This mandate has been confirmed through a fresh study of Scripture that includes the Old Testament call upon the people of Israel, the adoption of that call by Jesus, and the sending of the early disciples to carry on the work of Jesus through his church. For established churches, the adoption of a missional ethos may be challenging. However, new churches that start with a missional vision can have mission as its ethos that ultimately defines its culture.

I submit that being missional is not enough. There is a need to add to the missional conversation; "exile," "submission to Christ," and "temple-less." It is the incorporation of all of these elements together that I describe as the "Saturday" church. However, the challenge of transforming an established congregation into a submitted,

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<sup>36</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 227.

<sup>37</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949). See in particular the chapter titled "The Visible Community," 104-108.

exilic, temple-less and missional community is enormous. To facilitate this transition, it will be helpful to gain a better understanding of how organizations function and change.

### **Understanding the ecclesial community as a living system or human organism**

The local church community of faith is always in transition. Over the past few decades there has been a movement away from seeing organizations as machines. Hierarchical and mechanistic models of organization are giving way to flatter, dispersed models. As we learn from the study of living systems theory, organizations, including the local church, are similar to living organisms. Living systems thinking started to emerge in the latter half of the twentieth century. Of course this understanding was not new for the Apostle Paul. As Frank Viola observes, “It is clear from the New Testament that the church is a living organism...a new biological entity.”<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps as a result of the growing awareness of environmental issues, fresh metaphors have emerged using ecological models as a way to better understand how organizations organize and change. Living systems thinking provides insights into how the human organization is constantly subject to internal and external influences that impact how it continues to evolve. Ecological models provide a better understanding of the seasons or cycles of change that organizations go through. The local church in Canada is in a cycle of change or, to the extent that it is not, ought to be initiating and experiencing a cycle of change.

There are two aspects to the cycles of change: the larger societal and cultural changes that the local church finds itself part of and the localized external and internal

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<sup>38</sup> Frank Viola, “Rethinking the Church and Culture,” Beyond Evangelical, Personal Blog of Frank Viola, <http://ptmin.org/culture.htm> (accessed February 19, 2012).

changes that occur around or within the congregation. External influences may come out of the local geographical community such as changing ethnic or generational makeup of the local community. Examples of internal influences include a pastoral transition or moral failure. For the exiled local church, it is the current external societal and cultural influences that have overarching importance. Through this cultural lens it is possible to recapture the original vision for the local church. Further understanding of the science of ecological transitions will help the local church to navigate a re-visioning journey.

### **Ecological Cycles of Change**

When drawing upon ecological models, it is helpful to think of an ecological system, such as a forest, as a way of comparing the cycles of change in an ecological system with those in an organization. As a forest grows, it starts to overcome most other plant life on the forest floor. As the forest matures, weaker plants are pushed out or deprived of sunlight or water. This phenomenon has been drawn upon in leadership literature and described as the phase from “exploration to exploitation.”<sup>39</sup> This transition is often described as part of the growth phase of an organization.

However, within a fully developed ecological system there is usually an event or external influence that will create a crisis or loss that changes the course of the system. In a forest this could be a forest fire, or a disease that spreads, which then makes room for new growth.<sup>40</sup> In the local church it could be a change in pastoral leadership. Perhaps the founding pastor retires or leaves to join another church. There may be a moral failure in

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<sup>39</sup> Mary Crossan and David K. Hurst, “Strategic Renewal as Improvisation: Reconciling the Tension between Exploration and Exploitation,” (*Ecology and Strategy; Advances in Strategic Management*, vol. 23, 273-298), 273.

<sup>40</sup> David K. Hurst, *Crisis & Renewal: Meeting the Challenge of Organizational Change* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1995), 96–102.

leadership or a change in the local community from which the church draws its membership. Or, as is the case with the church at large, there is a change in society, which in turn also affects the local church.

In the current context, postmodernism is influencing the Christian faith and the local church. Coupled with postmodernism, the “post-Christendom” era means we have entered a period when Christianity is no longer a key influencer or shaper the culture it is part of. These cultural realities are having an enormous influence on how the local church continues to function in its community. All of these internal or external influences are changing the course and direction of the local church. Whether or not it is acknowledged by the local church community is another matter. A crisis and/or loss has occurred that in some cases, may feel like a death has entered the community of faith. At its deepest level, the loss being felt, when it is acknowledged, is the reality that the church is no longer functioning as the kind of faith community that Jesus called it to be. And this is the very reality the church must acknowledge in order for it to relinquish the past and receive a new future.

### **Catalysts for Transition**

Organizational consultants have noticed that crises and/or losses recur over time in fully developed organizations. The crisis interrupts the continuing *exploitation* phase; the phase where growth continues naturally and rapidly. The fruit of this crisis is a new reality and the acknowledgement of this new reality may occur immediately or it may take some time. Whether acknowledged, accepted, or not, reality for the organization has changed. David Hurst described this new period as the “backside of the ecological

model.”<sup>41</sup> It can be a period of enormous creativity as the organization seeks to imagine a new future. However, a new vision is required. This is what happened for the exiled people of Israel and Judah.

For a new vision to emerge for the local church the important “why” questions need to be asked and answered before the “what” and “how” questions are addressed. The Old Testament prophets and writers<sup>42</sup> asked the ‘why’ questions to help understand the exilic experience. It is tempting to seek a solution quickly by adopting a new program that is seen as a “quick fix” for a current crisis. Focusing on the “why” before the “what” and the “how” does not come naturally for most people. This is one of the reasons that dealing successfully with organizational change presents the most challenging time for leadership. It will feel lonely and dark at times. There will be times when it feels like a wilderness experience. The biblical narrative is almost entirely about these cycles of transition that can be compared with the ecological picture of organizational change. And sometimes, the change event is dramatic and long lasting. However, a failure to recognize the crisis or to implement the necessary changes will be devastating and may ultimately destroy the local church. If the leadership recognizes that change is necessary, the next question becomes, “Where do we start?”

### **Where to Start?**

The transformation of an established congregation usually starts with one or two, or perhaps even a larger group, that are awakened by the Spirit to hear a new call upon

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. This is a phrase Dr. Hurst used in a conversation we had concerning this topic and his work in using ecological models for understanding and leading organizational change. Dr. Hurst developed the double-loop model, visualized for this purpose with the loop going from left to right as “exploration to exploitation” and the loop coming back, from right to left being the “backside.”

<sup>42</sup> I am referring to the Priestly writers and the Deuteronomistic writers of the OT exilic period.

the congregation. It may also be one or more of the pastoral team. It is important for the leadership team to identify those who are awakening to the emerging call on the local church to change. If senior leadership, in particular the lead pastor, does not hear this call, there is little chance that change will occur. If lay leaders initiate discussions only to have them resisted or passively affirmed by the senior minister, change will not occur. In those cases, it will not be long for those who have sensed a call to mission to leave. If the senior leaders of the church catch the vision, the road of transformation, re-imagination and re-visioning the culture of the local congregations is possible, though still challenging.

Change is difficult in any circumstance, but fundamentally changing the ethos—the heart of how a congregation sees its essence—is the most difficult of adaptive challenges.<sup>43</sup> There will be resistance and push back as experienced by the Israelites after leaving Egypt. People will criticize because they will misunderstand the message. There will be confusion and a deep sense of bereavement; this, because of the loss of the known and the comfortable. A significant part of how people see themselves and how they see the congregation will seem to be slipping away. Members will invariably leave. In fact, if there is not a loss of members, it is usually a sure sign that change is merely superficial. A fundamental reorientation of the culture or ethos of the community will not occur without deep change in how the congregation views its own internal relationships and its relationship with the surrounding community. Some leaders may be inclined to ignore the

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<sup>43</sup> Ronald Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), and Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002). Heifetz introduced the term "adaptive" change as compared to "technical" change. These terms have become part of the vocabulary of leaders and what Heifetz has written about this subject is very helpful in moving forward with such a fundamental change as re-engineering an established congregation into a missional community.

signs of change and the gentle nudging of the Spirit. However, they do so at the risk of losing the congregation.

### **Facing the Brutal Facts**

Once the senior leaders sense the Spirit's call to transformation, it is incumbent upon them to "confront the brutal facts."<sup>44</sup> The important work for leadership will be a careful and honest confrontation of the current state of the congregational culture. Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk provide a useful visual tool for this self-analysis. They have borrowed an image from those working in the field of ecological models of organizational change; models that see human organizations as living systems or organisms. They adapted these models for churches to reflect three colored zones for church transition.<sup>45</sup> The green zone is described as emergent leadership, the blue zone is performance leadership and the final zone, the red zone, is reactive leadership.<sup>46</sup> The blue zone is the 'exploitation' phase of organizational transition. A church in the red zone will experience a crisis or at least recognize that it is no longer called to be what it once was. If brutally honest, most established congregations will find themselves in the "red zone." When the determination is made, the natural inclination may be to establish a committee or develop a planning team. This should be resisted.

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<sup>44</sup> Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 65 and Thom Rainer, *Breakout Churches* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishers, 2005), 72. This is a phrase used by Jim Collins in his seminal book on leadership that has become another key phrase in the language of organizational change. Thom Rainer rephrased this language as "The ABC Moment" in his book on churches — standing for awareness, belief and crisis.

<sup>45</sup> Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 41-43.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

### **A Journey of Discovery—Not a Strategic Plan**

Much of the church change and growth initiatives that took place over the past 20 years arose out of a business model. Strategic plans were developed to implement programmatic change designed to attract new people to the church.<sup>47</sup> The CEO leader was held up as the effective model for initiating change. This led to the seeker-sensitive model of worship that also fostered the painful reality of "worship wars." Worship style was often borrowed from other perceived "successful" churches rather than emerging from within the faith community itself. But despite all the information regarding managing change in organizations, the rapid change of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century proved overwhelming for both Christian and secular organizations. Margaret Wheatley observes: "I'm sad to report that in the past few years, ever since uncertainty became our insistent twenty-first century companion, leadership strategies have taken a great leap backwards to the familiar territory of command and control."<sup>48</sup> Given the present organizational climate, an atypical leader may be needed.

Researchers, recognizing this pervasive tendency, have put forward several different terms to describe the preferred leadership models. The terminology includes the "transformational" and "transcendent" leader, as types of leaders required to navigate the challenging times. These terms have emerged from and succeeded the general "servant"

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<sup>47</sup> Will Mancini, *Church Unique* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 24-26. The other problem with strategic planning is that, as change is happening so rapidly, plans can also become obsolete very quickly.

<sup>48</sup> Margaret Wheatley, *Finding Our Way* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2005) 4 and Art Kleiner, "The Thought Leader Interview: Meg Wheatley," *Strategy+Business*, November 22, 2011/Winter 2011/Issue 65, <http://www.strategy-business.com/article/11406?gko=15f1d>, (accessed December 1, 2011). In this more recent interview, Ms. Wheatley describes how the economic crisis felt after 2008 has made it even more challenging for leaders. There is a pervasive sense of fear. "People take fewer risks; creativity and participation disappear."

leader model started by Robert Greenleaf more than three decades ago.<sup>49</sup> The essence of such leadership is that if a leader seeks to facilitate transformation, the leader must embody the change he or she seeks.<sup>50</sup> The local church should consider this as a requirement not only for its leadership, but as well for itself. This form of embodiment is a key aspect of Saturday leadership.

So often church leaders talk about being "missional," but that is as far as they go. There is no embodiment of the missional life. It is so important for Christian leaders to seek the guidance of the Spirit and to listen to where God is calling them into their community. This is vital to living incarnationally.<sup>51</sup> It will be out of their personal experience of incarnational living that leaders can share a new story with the church; an incarnational story that will show the way for the church to become an incarnational community. The most important shift for an established congregation is to stop thinking of "doing" missional projects and start thinking of the church as a community "being" missional. This means not only seeking justice<sup>52</sup> but being just and acting justly; not only seeking mercy but being merciful; not only seeking grace but being graceful. This also means to become present, "...to simply become part of the very fabric of a community and to engage in the humanity of it all."<sup>53</sup> An important part of that engagement will be to

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<sup>49</sup> Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1977). The term "servant leader" is usually ascribed to Robert Greenleaf, from his very influential book on the subject.

<sup>50</sup> Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 116. Alan Hirsch makes this point well. "Inspirational leadership involves a relationship between leaders and followers in which each influences the other to pursue common objectives, with the aim of transforming followers into leaders in their own right."

<sup>51</sup> One of the significant factors in the effectiveness of some emerging exilic leaders is their intentional living and working among the poor.

<sup>52</sup> I heard Leonard Sweet make this point in an advance workshop. We do not live out the gospel if we act like prosecutors, seeking out justice. Rather the call of Micah 6:8 is "to act justly."

<sup>53</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 133.

have conversations with those in the surrounding local community, to discern needs and to build trust.

### **The Power of Conversations**

Encouraging cultural change towards a Saturday community will be a slow process requiring patience. It will be important to identify those within the congregation who are what Craig Van Gelder describes as, “early adapters and early majority.”<sup>54</sup> With these folk, start having conversations that seek to focus on the “why” of being missional. As Margaret Wheatley suggests, “Conversation is the way we discover how to transform our world, together.”<sup>55</sup> Encourage those who are open to this conversation to start listening for the Holy Spirit's nudging for ways in which they can live and be missional in their own lives. Each person has their own unique story and therefore, their own way of being missional and living incarnationally within their communities. Out of these conversations questions will arise. Why are we initiating change? Are not things fine as they are? The questions must be answered for real adaptive change to occur.

### **Answering the “Why” of Missional**

In addition to encouraging conversations among individuals, it will be important to share with the larger congregation why the church is called to be missional. Keep in mind that this is but one component of the Saturday church. The other components—exilic, submitted, engaged, temple-less—must also be addressed. This will involve a series of teachings on the gospel, discipleship, on the Old Testament narrative, the exile

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<sup>54</sup> Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 180.

<sup>55</sup> Margaret Wheatley, *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2002), 27.

story, the incarnation of Jesus, the teaching and the life of Jesus, the call of Jesus on his disciples and the ministry and development of the early church.<sup>56</sup>

Pastoral leaders must not only be students of Scripture but also students of history, philosophy, and culture.<sup>57</sup> All mission activity needs to be contextualized in the targeted culture. The Apostle Paul understood this. His emergent theology that rose out of the church in Antioch is a good example.<sup>58</sup> Vincent Donovan, who worked among the Masai of Africa, writes: "Culture is all encompassing and all important in the history of salvation."<sup>59</sup> As such, it is vital for Canadians to understand that we are living in a largely post-Christian culture.<sup>60</sup>

For those outside the church—particularly the younger generations—  
"Christianity isn't normal."<sup>61</sup> Knowing this ought to shape and influence how we seek to engage those without Christian origins. The differences are almost as dramatic as those described by Vincent Donovan in writing about his work with the Masai in Africa. As he discovered, those in the church needed to understand that God was already at work in the

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<sup>56</sup> For this transformational understanding to occur, it is important to see the entire biblical story as a connected narrative of exile leading to restoration and renewal in Christ.

<sup>57</sup> Mark Batterson, "The Relationships of Winds and Waves," *The Church of the Perfect Storm*, 109-118. This is a worthwhile discussion on how the church ought to relate to and create culture. There is difference of opinion on the ability of the church to "create" culture, especially as an exiled church. Of course, the local church has the ability to create its own culture, which is still very important.

<sup>58</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2006). Ray Anderson provides an excellent treatment of emergent theology coming out of Antioch as the church started to include the gentile believers as a result of the Holy Spirit being powerfully evident in the lives of Gentiles.

<sup>59</sup> Vincent J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 29.

<sup>60</sup> Post-Christian is not the same as post-Christendom. In a post-Christian society, Christian belief is largely rejected as offering any meaning to one's life. Christianity is no longer part of the larger story of our contemporary culture.

<sup>61</sup> Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus But Not the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 29.

community outside of the church.<sup>62</sup> We in the church need to listen to the Spirit and join Jesus in what he is already doing in the community. We would do well to pay attention to the Jews of the Exile period who creatively lived within the Babylonian culture while maintaining their own distinctive culture. They were able to further develop their distinct culture in creative and innovative ways.<sup>63</sup> The missional culture of the emerging twenty-first century church should seek to embody the "way" of the early church. It was this way of living and incarnating the Gospel that led to its growth.

Embodying the "way" will look much different in the current culture with all of its technological advances. Yet, bringing it fully within all aspects of the life of the church will be the same. Reggie McNeal wrote: "Moving to an external focus pushes the church from doing missions as some second-mile project into being on mission as a way of life."<sup>64</sup> But as Michael Frost reminds us, a missional way of living is both "demonstration" *and* "announcement."<sup>65</sup> It is still important for the church to announce the reign of God and the gospel message of hope and restoration.

In the history of the church, there have been seasons where "demonstration" was emphasized and other seasons when "announcement" had priority. The key is to balance the two. The reality in Western society is that "announcement" is often reserved for the family of believers as it is more difficult to deliver a message of the reign of Christ

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<sup>62</sup> Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*, 54. "The Masai are no more a lost people than the Christians of Africa or of Europe and America are. The Masai are a people loved by God, and the signs of this love are manifest in their lives."

<sup>63</sup> Michael Frost, *Exiles* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006). Frost's book provides an excellent treatment of using the metaphor of "exile" in thinking of the missional church.

<sup>64</sup> Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 42.

<sup>65</sup> Michael Frost, *The Road to Missional: Journey to the Center of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 36.

without being preachy. However, the message will be received more readily if it is in the context of a genuine demonstration of hope and restoration under the reign of Christ. John Elliott observes that: "Christianity . . . was a movement which sustained a call to conversion with a community of care."<sup>66</sup> For the early church, scholars suggest that was distinctive and caring. This of course led both to its persecution and ultimately its success.<sup>67</sup>

### **What Does the Missional Church Look Like?**

Although I am also emphasizing exilic, submitted and temple-less, the overarching guidance for the local church is the missional focus. The leadership of the local church must communicate the need for being missional, in a compelling and understandable way. Alan Hirsch provides a good working definition of the missional church as "a community of God's people that defines itself, and organizes its life around, its real purposes of being an agent of God's mission in the world."<sup>68</sup> Such a church will see itself as "incarnational, messianic and apostolic."<sup>69</sup> A church that is incarnational, messianic and apostolic will first see itself as submitted to the headship of Jesus Christ.

The early apostles were intent on following the way of Jesus and his teachings in their daily lives. They were also witnesses to his gospel message. Both Peter and Paul self-identified as apostles. By doing so, they understood their lives in the context of full submission to Christ and he employed all that they were. Douglas Harink writes of Peter: "Factors of Peter's personality become apostolic insofar as Jesus Christ appropriates

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<sup>66</sup> Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless*, 285.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>68</sup> Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 82.

<sup>69</sup> Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 12.

them and renders them serviceable to Peter's calling and commission."<sup>70</sup> In this sense, all of one's natural character and personality is not lost. They are in fact, infused with one's submission of these characteristics to the greater apostolic calling. God then uses these characteristics to spread his message of hope and restoration. It is this message of God's grace, hope, and restoration that is such an integral part of the messianic nature of the church.

If at its core the nature of the church is a messianic nature, than indivisible to that nature is the mission of the Messiah. That mission is the outward expression of the messianic nature. And given that mission is largely outward focused, it may require revisiting and re-writing the vision statement.

### **Changing the Vision Statement from Inward to Outward Focused<sup>71</sup>**

It has become the norm for organizations, both profit and not-for-profit, to develop a mission and vision statement. Many vision statements focus on the organization itself and express an expectation for what it will look like. Becoming a welcoming place, a place where those who have no religious experience will feel comfortable, is an example. However, a more missional vision would foresee how the church will affect the community around it. As a result, things ought to change in the surrounding community, as the church fulfills its mission.

The vision for a not-for-profit organization should focus on the population it seeks to help, and the vision statement itself can serve to achieve that. Hildy Gottlieb contends

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<sup>70</sup> Harink, *1 & 2 Peter*, 28.

<sup>71</sup> I am indebted to my good friend, Robert Kline, for introducing me to this distinction and its importance for the not-for-profit sector. He read an article about it somewhere but could not remember the source.

that an effective vision statement will, "...tell the world what change you wish to create for the future of your community."<sup>72</sup> A mission oriented vision will provide to the church a clear view for how it will change the lives of its local community. An externally focused vision statement will direct all aspects of the life of the church. In order for the church to realize a missional vision, many Christians, including long-time believers, will need a re-orientation of how they view their daily lives. This re-orientation is vital for incarnating the mission into everyday life.

### **Integrating Sacred and Secular**

The challenge for a missional re-orientation is that the Sunday worship event has, to a certain extent, contributed to the separation of our lives into two parts; sacred and secular. Many Christians tend to think attending church, participating in small groups, prayer life and Bible reading, as one's sacred life. Everything else is secular. Even just a cursory examination of the lives of Jesus and the Apostle Paul reveals that their lives were not so delineated. By seeing our family life, work life, social life, recreational life, and time spent in worship and prayer, as sacred, it will be easier to see one's entire life experience in the context of the mission of Jesus. These are key components of discipleship.

Peter sought to capture this sense of integration of the sacred and secular for the early church in his first epistle. Eugene Boring summarizes this, writing: "Their rebirth to a new life did not mean an adding of Christian responsibilities to their previous

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<sup>72</sup> Hildy Gottlieb, "3 Statements that Can Change the World: Mission/Vision/Values," *Creating the Future*, [http://www.help4nonprofits.com/NP\\_Bd\\_MissionVisionValues\\_Art.htm](http://www.help4nonprofits.com/NP_Bd_MissionVisionValues_Art.htm) (accessed November 5, 2011).

commitments, but a subsuming of everything under the lordship of Jesus Christ.”<sup>73</sup> This is an important transition for the missional church. It is so easy to default to seeing missional as a programmatic response to the call of Jesus. The collective time spent by church members in the local community, addressing the needs of the community, may be seen as the appropriate missional response. While it is an important aspect, the missional life of the church is much deeper and richer than this. The “being” of missional life is also reflected in the daily life of the members of the faith community. By integrating the missional life into every aspect of life, “announcement” and “demonstration”<sup>74</sup> will become more natural.

A pastor friend introduced the importance of integrating the spiritual and secular to his church community by drawing from life examples in the community. He did so by occasionally interviewing members of the community as part of the Sunday worship time. During this time he asked them questions about how their faith intersected with their daily life, including their work and family. This created an awakening for many to the reality that all of their life is sacred. And, when so seen, it becomes more natural to be open to the leading of the Spirit in the daily interaction with family, friends, colleagues, and people met in restaurants and stores.

### **The Importance of Mystery, Prayer, and Listening to the Spirit**

There is much in our universe that cannot be understood –it is beyond comprehension. God revealed this to Job and Jesus alluded to this in his parables about the kingdom of God (Matt 13). Those unknowable things, the mysteries, have become a

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<sup>73</sup> Boring, *1 Peter*, 145.

<sup>74</sup> Michael Frost, *The Road to Missional* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 57.

feature of the postmodern perspective. The ability of science to provide all answers is being challenged. For the postmodern generation, there is a fresh openness to the supernatural. As part of the journey into the exilic Saturday experience, it is important to embrace mystery. Part of that mystery is prayer.

It is amazing what can happen when a community opens itself up to hearing from God.<sup>75</sup> It is through prayer that individuals can hear from the Holy Spirit. By being open to the voice of the Spirit, individuals may discover where and how they are being called to mission in their community. The Spirit will lead them to changes of lifestyle, behaviors and attitudes needed for the mission. Of equal importance, an individual that is open to the Spirit may discern the missional call for the local church, in that season. An individual may also hear the voice of the Spirit through the breakthroughs others have experienced. This is where the leader who is tuned into the emerging stories of the congregation is able to assist individuals in discovering their personal call.

It is important for the leaders to look for, call out and build upon, small successes. Dan and Chip Heath describe these successes as ‘bright spots.’<sup>76</sup> Are there individuals or a group of individuals who have captured the vision and are executing successfully even if only on a small scale? For many, seeing the successes of others provides inspiration for their own endeavors for Saturday living. Change can be encouraged by focusing on the

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<sup>75</sup> I was reminded of this a few months ago. I was speaking with a pastor friend about this subject of the missional church. He was encouraging parishioners to pray for the church. A woman in his congregation told him she felt God's call to pray for the worship service during worship. While she did not want to miss the experience of worship, she felt she had no choice; this was the ministry God was calling her into.

<sup>76</sup> Chip Heath and Dan Heath, *Switch: How to Change Things when Change is Hard* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2010), 27.

bright spots. The Heaths provide several examples to support their argument and many were validated by my own experience.

The leader's ability to work with stories is a significant resource for indentifying the bright spots within the community. This may include stories from his or her personal life. But more frequently the stories will emerge out of the faith community itself, and from the secular community. Everyone wants to feel that their own story matters. They are interested in discovering how their own story fits into the greater narrative of their community and the meta-narrative of God. Leaders who are serious about change must also be serious about the power of a story. Seth Godin is correct when he suggests that leaders "give people stories they can tell themselves...stories about the future and about change."<sup>77</sup> Stories are best when shared. And, sharing stories with humility can help build a feeling there is forward momentum within the local church.

### **Creating Movement**

People want to feel that they are part of something that is building, something that is moving forward. For difficult adaptive change to become part of the culture or ethos of the church, the individuals forming the faith community must have a sense of forward momentum; that positive changes are leading the church into becoming the Saturday church of its vision. However, this kind of adaptive change of a local church culture cannot be imposed. It can only be encouraged by constantly going back to the "why" questions and by casting and re-casting the future image of a community that is open to God's call to participate in his mission. It will be helpful to re-frame the "story" of the local church in the context of God's continuing story. Diana Butler Bass writes that, "the

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<sup>77</sup> Godin, *Tribes*, 138.

more intentional a congregation is about its story (and the more honest, authentic, and coherent as well), the more likely it is to be a place of vital traditioning and practice.”<sup>78</sup>

This is what the kingdom life is about. It is about movement and momentum. It is where everything is submitted to the lordship of Christ and is fitted within His kingdom already actively present here on earth. Followers of Jesus are invited to be drawn along and caught up in the unfolding mystery of God's kingdom story. Each person has his or her own story, and each church has its own story. Jesus invites his followers to submit their individual stories under God's overarching story. It's the same for each church. God's story is a missional story and if the church wants to be part it, then it will join the missional journey and adventure! This is not necessarily an adventure that is sought, but a consequence of faithfully living out the missional life with Christ day by day.

To assist with creating movement and building momentum, it will also be important for the congregation to discern its values, what Will Mancini creatively describes as the “common heartbeat”.<sup>79</sup> Encouraging a Saturday culture for a church will be more natural if it is done in the context of values that everyone shares. These same values will help shape a missional focused vision for the community. As noted earlier, the specifics of the vision must be unique to each local church and its context.

### **Each Church is Unique**

The failure of many church initiatives occurs simply because they attempted to emulate the programs of other churches. The first problem is that the leadership has mistakenly believed that programmatic change will transform the church culture. The

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<sup>78</sup> Diana Butler Bass, *The Practicing Congregation* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004), 97.

<sup>79</sup> Will Mancini, *Church Unique: How Missional Leaders Cast Vision, Capture Culture, and Create Movement* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 128.

second problem is that the new program is not a natural fit for the existing congregation. The failure in integrating programs from other places reinforces the fact that every church is unique. Each church needs to discover its own unique way of worship, of organization, and its own unique missional call.<sup>80</sup> The “call” to mission is the same for every church, but the “how” in doing mission, will be unique to each. The command to Israel to love God is first found in Deuteronomy 6: 5 and this command permeates the Old Testament narrative. But this same command is re-framed by Jesus as the Great Commandment (to love God and to love one’s neighbor). How that command is realized in each life and in each community will be different.

Will Mancini offers some helpful tools to assist in discerning the church’s unique calling. It involves the intersection of what he describes as “the local predicament,” the “collective potential,” and the “apostolic esprit.”<sup>81</sup> Considering “the local predicament” will serve in discovering a vision for the church. What are the unique local challenges that the church feels called to address? Considering the “collective potential” will reveal the strengths and resources of the local congregation.<sup>82</sup> Finally, considering the “apostolic esprit” will reveal the historical ministry of the church. What has been its “sweet spot” for ministry? Is it to students, to seniors, or to single mothers? These three will provide to the church key elements so it can more clearly focus in on its call and mission. Effective mission is focused mission. However, focused mission will only arise out of a community that has a clear self-understanding.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 119-123.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 102-103.

<sup>82</sup> From my own experience, determining the extent of resources will only become clear as the church embarks upon community ministry. Often, previously hidden talents will emerge out of the woodwork.

### **The Rituals of a Saturday Church**

Becoming a Saturday church is a matter of capturing a new way of being and seeing itself as a new community. The local church can draw inspiration from the Exodus experience of the people of Israel. The Israelites were a part of the Egyptian culture for over 400 years. They absorbed many of the habits and the worldview of this pagan culture. Even as slaves and under oppression, they grew accustomed to that life. As such, God had to use the leadership of Moses to re-shape their worldview. The people needed to see, once more, the God of their forefather Abraham as the one true God.

Early in this new relationship, the Israelites were witnesses to great miracles; the parting of the Red Sea, the provision of food and water, among them. It was an enormous community to keep organized and to lead. Therefore, God needed to teach them a new way of living with laws that would shape their relationships, their food preparation, their worship, their governance and their organizational structure. And God needed to establish new rituals. In times of change and transition, rituals are important. “Any kind of activity, turned into a ritual and coupled with some mindful intent, can help you move from one state of mind and feeling to another.”<sup>83</sup> The church may require new rituals as well. The rituals that are developed and become unique to the particular church will generally emerge out of the activities and engagements of the church including, especially, those in the local community.

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<sup>83</sup> Ronald A Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002) 184.

### Terms of Engagement: “Faithful Presence”<sup>84</sup>

John Davison Hunter uses this helpful term, “faithful presence” in his book, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, & Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*. He has captured in a powerful way, many of the key thoughts for the Saturday church.<sup>85</sup> However, what the missional church means and might look like when it is lived out, both in the lives of individuals and the local church, is somewhat elusive. So often the term “missional” is used in the sense of “projects.” However, missional is more in the manner of “being” in that it is about a pervasive way of life for the church. In this sense of the word, the church must be present within the community, in a quiet humble way. The community ought to experience this presence, both corporately and individually.<sup>86</sup> It is a reflection of what the local church is called into as a daily and weekly reality as it exists side by side with every area of its local community. By coming alongside those of the community that are experiencing hardship, loss, pain, suffering, hunger and other needs, the faith community incarnates the presence of Jesus. Faithful presence becomes a demonstration of “the transformational experience of our own faith.”<sup>87</sup>

A key aspect of Hunter’s term is “faithful.” If “presence” is part of a programmatic response to missional calling, then the church simply will come into the

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<sup>84</sup> James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, & Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 243.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> While his book had not yet been released at the time, it was the germ of this idea that drew a group of us to adopt the word “Presence” as the name of the new church community started in London, Ontario during the early months of 2007. For our small group, this word was chosen to symbolically express the presence of Jesus in our lives and being the presence of Jesus in our community. While there was symbolic power in the word, nevertheless, it was still very challenging to make it a reality as part of the church ethos.

<sup>87</sup> R. Larry Shelton, *Cross & Covenant: Interpreting the Atonement for 21st Century Mission* (Tyrone, GA: Paternoster, 2006), 2.

community for a season, and then leave. A once a year initiative with a local group may be featured on the website and on screens during worship. An annual mission trip to another country would be another example. While these aspects of missional life are important, meaningful and deep relationships are only developed over time, through hard times and good times. ‘Faithful’ presence involves a commitment to daily living the call in a community, in the context of following Jesus. It is a presence that is not based upon a program, but arises out of living among and responding to what happens to an individual in the context of their lives. Providing hope and restoration is one of the important features of faithful presence.

### **Terms of Engagement: Restoration**

During the latter part of the biblical exile, the Old Testament prophets caught the persistent message through the Holy Spirit that God’s plan for the people of Israel was to restore them, and they were to offer restoration to others (Exodus 19:6). This became the key mandate adopted by Jesus, to offer restoration to the broken, the poor, the marginalized, the sick and the widowed. Gabe Lyons offers an encouraging perspective of the engagement of next generation in *Next Christians*.<sup>88</sup> In it, he identified that one of the key characteristics of the next generation of Christians is their commitment to following the work of Jesus in restoring lives. This form of engagement seems to be happening in many of their faith communities. Next generation Christians, as followers of Jesus, have moved beyond the labels of Christianity, whether they are conservative, liberal, or emergent. There are a growing number of examples of next generation

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<sup>88</sup> Gabe Lyons, *Next Christians: The Good News About the End of Christian America; How a New Generation is Restoring the Faith* (New York: Doubleday, 2010)

Christians moving into communities with significant needs and becoming part of those communities. They typically don't overtly do what they do under the label of their Christianity although they will freely share the source of their inspiration and the Person they belong to. The Western church needs to recover this ancient motif of restoration as a key aspect of its covenantal relationship with God. Just as God promises restoration, the local church as a community of faith, as God's ambassadors, must be seen as a restorative presence in its local community. The tragedy of the Old Testament story is that the Temple became a place that distracted the people of Israel from providing hope and restoration to others.

### **Terms of Engagement: Temple-less**

Arguably, the Temple became one of the key aspects of the Jewish culture that held them back from their special calling to be a unique nation and an example to the surrounding nations. The people of Israel and Judah became so caught up with the Temple that they lost sight of their greater calling. The people lost their focus on justice and care for the poor and the marginalized. It was only after the first Temple was destroyed that the creative energies of the Jewish people could re-focus on the original call of the Mosaic covenant. So what implications and teaching can be gleaned from this experience today? Arguably, many local churches are missing out on fresh creativity because the focus is on things that distract the church from its true missional call. I refer to such distractions metaphorically as temples. For many churches it is the building itself that has become the distracting temple. This is particularly so for a declining congregation which has become largely defined by its church building. For others it may

the grand building project for a new and bigger facility.<sup>89</sup> The church must always honestly examine its activities and projects to assess whether a metaphorical temple is being constructed that is distracting the church from its calling.

Middlemas suggests that, “If ‘the exile’ creates a sense of particularity and difference, ‘templeless’ highlights that which is held in common, and suggests creative unifying strategies for communities of faith today.”<sup>90</sup> The question then for local churches is: What are the temples in our community that are holding us back from being truly missional communities? What are the temples that are draining our energies, both financially and psychologically? What temples are dividing the community? What are the temples that represent our identity more so than what ought to be our identity in the community? Is it the building?<sup>91</sup> Is it the Sunday preaching?<sup>92</sup> Is it the Sunday worship time? The true unifying temple for the exilic missional church, around which everything is centered, must be Jesus Christ. The unifying feature is centered on a covenantal relationship with Christ.<sup>93</sup> The faith community must regularly revisit and renew its covenant to follow Christ into exile, to be his presence in the community. As noted

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<sup>89</sup> In making this statement, I am not condemning all building projects. However, it is always important to ask whether the particular project is distracting the church away from its vision and calling.

<sup>90</sup> Middlemas, *Templeless Age*, 143.

<sup>91</sup> With respect to buildings, there are emerging examples of churches being very intentional about sharing space with the local community. Other examples include selling a valuable property and renting less expensive space, and rather than building a new building, sending a group out to start a new community elsewhere in the city.

<sup>92</sup> In my personal experience I have seen this as a key aspect of pastor selection. Someone in the meeting will say: “We are known for our preaching; therefore we need to hire a strong preacher.”

<sup>93</sup> R. Larry Shelton, *Cross & Covenant*. Professor Shelton provides a comprehensive and persuasive analysis of the relational covenant with Christ and the importance of covenant renewal for the Church and for Christians. This sense of covenant renewal is an important aspect of Saturday leadership and the Saturday church that warrants much further thought and analysis.

above, what that will look like for each local church and for each follower of Christ will be unique for that church and for that follower.

### **Terms of Engagement: Practicing Justice**

The major and minor prophets of the Old Testament speak of a common theme. The people of Israel were called by God to be an example of doing justice, as a witness to all the surrounding nations. They were commanded to assist the poor and to act justly. The preparatory work in the desert during the Exodus was to lay the foundation for such a lifestyle. Yet, over and over, the people disobeyed and as a nation, Israel failed to realize its call. The prophet Isaiah delivered the indictment: “They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow’s case does not come before them” (Isa. 1:23). The prophet Jeremiah echoed this admonition, but did so even more forcefully: “Their evil deeds have no limit; they do not plead the case of the fatherless to win it, they do not defend the rights of the poor” (Jer. 5:28). As a result, God allowed the nation to be destroyed. The Temple, which was no longer used for its purpose,<sup>94</sup> was destroyed by the Babylonians. The nation was broken apart with many of the intellectuals, including the prophet Ezekiel, carried off to live in exile in the kingdom of Babylon.<sup>95</sup> It is during this period of exile that God, through the voice of Ezekiel, reminded the people of Israel of their history, of their great calling and of God’s promise yet to restore them if they chose to return to him and follow his desire for them. So, Ezekiel described the rebuilding and restoration of the Temple, using imagery they would understand and relate to so powerfully (Ezek. 40-44).

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<sup>94</sup> Jeremiah 7:1-11.

<sup>95</sup> Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament*, 386-387.

Recently, a new awareness has awakened to the pervasive requirement from God for justice as prescribed throughout Scripture. For many years the church was focused on buildings, programs, church growth, seeker sensitive ministry, consumer Christianity, and personal salvation. Often there was no balance between soteriology and the theology of restorative and social justice. Yet it is clear that Jesus calls the church to carry on this ministry. The parable of the sheep and the goats could not be clearer (Matt. 25:31-46). In this parable, Jesus illustrates that his presence in the world is to be experienced through the presence and actions of his followers: “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matt 25:40).

The awareness of social justice issues has recently been raised by many missional oriented thinkers, including Ron Sider, Jim Wallis and Shane Claiborne and by organizations such as Sojourners.<sup>96</sup> Could it be that these voices are a call from God for the contemporary church to integrate justice into the ethos and ecclesiological fabric of the church? Timothy Keller reminds us that, “Doing justice includes not only the righting of wrongs, but generosity and social concern, especially toward the poor and the vulnerable.”<sup>97</sup> Yet there is great danger that the local church will simply make social justice another program.<sup>98</sup> It must mean much more than simply giving money to the poor and sending groups on short-term mission trips even though these initiatives are good in themselves. It will mean a revolutionary refocusing of the mission, energies and financial resources away from the inward focused practices of the past. It will mean that the church

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<sup>96</sup> Sojourners website: <http://www.sojo.net/>

<sup>97</sup> Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., 2010), 18.

<sup>98</sup> David Fitch made this comment at a workshop led by him at an Evolving Church conference I attended, which focused on the theme of Restorative Justice.

will come along beside those who are marginalized; the poor and the disenfranchised, the lonely and those who have lost hope. In addition to serving and acting justly, the church must creatively seek long term solutions to systemic problems of poverty and injustice. This will require a transition from a position of power to a position of vulnerability and weakness. Jesus provided examples of his own vulnerability and weakness as he was led into the wilderness, yet he does not succumb to Satan's promise of power (Matt 4:1-11). And, in the Garden of Gethsemane, he willingly surrendered to his captors (Matt 26: 46-56). For the local church, assuming a position of vulnerability and weakness means it will remove barriers that make it uncomfortable for the marginalized in society to be a part of the faith community. It means learning to appreciate and empathize with the fragility of lives, both physically and mentally. This can only be learned by spending time in faithful presence with those of the faith community and the surrounding community who are suffering.

### **Terms of Engagement: The Great Commission**

Marching orders for the Church were given by Jesus following his resurrection and these are commonly referred to as the Great Commission. As recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus said: "go and make disciples of all nations ..." (28:19). Generally, the locus of the Great Commission is on preaching the gospel message—the good news. The preaching component is often understood in the context of missionaries going into other countries. However, this understanding has expanded in the past few decades with the advent of the "seeker-sensitive" church as a methodology by which to reach the "unchurched" of our local communities.

However, the Gospel of Mark replaces the word “nations” with “world” where Jesus is recorded as saying “go into all the world ...” (16:15). James Davison Hunter has an interesting spin on the translation in Mark’s gospel—“go into all the world”. He brings the command of Jesus into a personal context. This makes the Great Commission not just about preaching, but it makes it personal as well, specifically in our way of living. And not only personal in the context of our sacred life but also personal in the work that we do. Hunter suggests: “The church is to go into all realms of social life: in volunteer and paid labor—skilled and unskilled labor, the crafts, engineering, commerce, art, law, architecture, teaching, health care, and service.”<sup>99</sup> This view raises the bar for leadership. Ministry in this context will broaden the scope of Christian leadership. The heart and goal of Jesus in discipleship is ultimately realized in the integration of one’s life into our world. And this is perhaps what Michael Frost has in mind when he encourages “missional” to be both demonstration *and* proclamation. Every follower of Jesus can have a leadership role, not only within the local church but also in their place of work. For Moderns, integrating the sacred on the job can be a fearful possibility, as that context is no longer considered an acceptable place for sharing the Christian faith.<sup>100</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Transitioning and re-imagining an established congregation into an exilic, submitted, temple-less and missional community will be challenging. It will require great patience and persistence and it will be tempting to either give up too easily or declare victory too quickly. To ensure that the church goes forward in transition, the leadership team should refer back to the Roxburgh and Romanuk visual model periodically, and be

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<sup>99</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 257.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 259-261.

brutally honest about where the church is on its journey of change. They also need to avoid the temptation of forcing something on the community, or implementing a new program that has worked elsewhere. It will be important to always balance the need to wait for discernment, and yet be progressive. Leaders must also pay attention to what all the people in the faith community might contribute. It may be that the voice of the Spirit will be heard by someone on the margins of the congregation.

Finally, the role of the leaders in a local church environment will be critical to the success of a re-visioning process. If the local church is called to a Saturday church model, its leaders must embrace Saturday leadership. We now move to examine what Saturday leadership means for the individual leader.

## CHAPTER 6

## SATURDAY LEADERSHIP: SUBMITTED AND ENGAGED EXILIC LEADERSHIP

**The Leader's Role is Still Critical**

Whether the church is a new plant, a restart, or an established community of faith, the role of the leader is critical in establishing, maintaining, or re-imagining a healthy ethos or culture. Leaders tend to emerge in all human organizations. There seems to be a natural inclination for some individuals to be followers and some to be leaders, although effective leaders will also have a good sense of followership. Whether the group is small or large, a single leader or several leaders will inevitably emerge. The number of leaders is often driven by the size and context of the group. Increasingly, there is also a growing interest in forms of shared leadership.

The local church in North America is truly part of what has been described in leadership literature as a “dynamic environment.”<sup>1</sup> The church finds itself in a rapidly changing world. Those changes include the cultural and societal realities and the constantly changing technological influences. For a community to be a healthy, exilic, temple-less, missional church, the leadership must prayerfully live out a life of what is being described as Saturday leadership. It is simply not enough for the leaders to preach the message of change. The entire community must see Saturday leadership lived out by the leadership team. Most important, the leader must submit his or her life and the role as leader to the headship of Jesus Christ. Yielding one's life to Christ must lead to a perspective of humility which is found in all Saturday leaders.

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Crossan, Dusya Vera, and Len Nanjad, “Transcendent leadership: Strategic leadership in dynamic environments,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 19 (2008), 569.

The leader must also be honest as to whether he or she is a disciple and on mission. There will not be lasting change if the leaders themselves are not first changed. Leaders who seek to facilitate change must develop a passion for their own personal inward journey of change. All leaders have a side they are not able to see themselves—a blind spot or a dark side.<sup>2</sup> The leader may easily see behavior in others that seems incongruent but not when the same behavior is in their own life.<sup>3</sup> However, Farber–Robertson notes, optimistically: “Because the unawareness is designed, the possibility of our attaining awareness is always with us.”<sup>4</sup> Reggie McNeal echoes this suggesting that the most important information a leader will hold is “*self-understanding*.”<sup>5</sup> McNeal astutely observes: “Until church members see church leaders involved in this redeployment, they will not believe the external focus is critical.”<sup>6</sup> Leaders need to develop close relationships with a person or persons who will be honest with them, in order to better develop the required self-understanding.

Robert Kegan has concluded that the complexity of the postmodern society requires effective participants in society—especially leaders—to develop a higher level of relational abilities.<sup>7</sup> He describes different orders of relational ability. Until recently only what he describes as fourth order knowing has been attained by the most individuals. For a postmodern world, a fifth order is required. He suggests, “that what we

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<sup>2</sup> Anita Farber–Robertson, *Learning While Leading: Increasing Your Effectiveness in Ministry* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2000), 8–9. This has been described as “designed blindness.”

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>5</sup> Reggie McNeal, *A Work of Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000) xiv.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 75.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 316–317.

call “postmodernism” is not just a *different* way of thinking, it is identifiable on the continuum of the evolution of consciousness; that the different “strands” or “faces” of postmodernism others have identified correspond to slightly different places on this continuum; that what postmodernism is “post” to is the fourth order of consciousness.”<sup>8</sup> Kegan identifies three areas where this next order is important: “conflict, leadership, and knowledge creation.”<sup>9</sup>

It is perhaps with this reality in view that researchers in the business community have identified a form of leadership described as “transcendent leadership.”<sup>10</sup> In the past the emphasis was on identifying a leader based on whether the leader had followers. The transcendent leader however must incorporate “two more levels of leadership responsibility: leadership of self and leadership of the organization.”<sup>11</sup> C. Otto Scharmer identified one additional important element for leadership awareness. This is an important aspect of what Crossan, Vera and Nanjad describe as “leadership of the self.” Scharmer perceptively identifies this element as “the inner place from which we operate.”<sup>12</sup> He has also described this as ‘connecting to Source.’<sup>13</sup> For Christian leaders this important source is Jesus Christ.

These various aspects of leadership that have been identified as being important in business and institutional leadership for the late modern/postmodern world are also

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 317.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 307.

<sup>10</sup> Crossan, Vera, and Nanjad, “Transcendent Leadership,” 569.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 569.

<sup>12</sup> C. Otto Scharmer, “Leading from the Emerging Future: Minds for Change – Future of Global Development,” Speech delivered at Ceremony to Mark the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of BMZ Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, November 13, 2011, Berlin, [http://www.ottoscharmer.com/docs/articles/2011\\_BMZ\\_Forum\\_Scharmer.pdf](http://www.ottoscharmer.com/docs/articles/2011_BMZ_Forum_Scharmer.pdf) (accessed January 2, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Scharmer, *Theory U*, 38.

important elements of Saturday leadership. There is, however, an important distinctive for Saturday leadership. This notable feature is a pattern of leadership that is submitted to the life, work, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus. In this chapter I will flesh out what it takes to be a Saturday leader. In other words, what does Saturday leadership look like in the day-to-day experience of the church leader? Three areas of leading will be considered: leadership of self, leading others and leading the organization.

### **Leadership of Self**

#### *A Place of Two Realities*

There are two separate but connected parts to the reality of Saturday leadership. First there is the actual experience of “being”<sup>14</sup> in a place of exile, as Jesus was on that Saturday, separated from the Father. There are two aspects of this first reality; living it out in the community (both the church community and the surrounding community) with others and the personal exilic experiences of leadership.<sup>15</sup> Second, is living with the Easter Sunday realities of new life, new hope, being renewed and fully alive. For Jesus, it was his submission to the Father on Holy Saturday that permitted the new life and renewal of Easter Sunday to be a reality. It is the leader’s role to bridge the two experiences in order to truly demonstrate the new life and restoration that is offered in following Jesus to the Cross. The ability to bridge these experiences will be enhanced by

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<sup>14</sup> When I use this term “being” in this context, I am using it in an experiential sense. In our contemporary western society, there will not usually be any physical or geographical aspect to the exilic experience. Rather, it is an intentional relational experience of being very involved with society yet not being caught up with or overly influenced by the gods of the society, including wealth, consumerism, prestige, titles and the like.

<sup>15</sup> This second aspect of exilic leadership refers to the times when leaders will feel abandoned and lost because of the challenges will naturally emerge out of the leader’s role as a Saturday leader.

a life of faithful submission to following Jesus into exile. However, bridging the two realities presents many challenges for leaders in the postmodern church, as it did for the leaders during the exilic experience of the Old Testament, for Jesus and for the early church. Preparation for leadership is necessary and the leadership of Moses provides a good example.

### *The Leader's Preparation: Moses*

Leadership of an organization through a difficult change event will require special preparation for the leader. We begin by examining the context for change and the preparation of Moses to provide the necessary leadership through a significant and challenging organizational change. God brought the people of Israel—Jacob and his family—into Egypt during a time of famine in the land of Canaan (Gen. 46-47). The people of Israel, at that time small in number, were settled in an area known as Goshen (Gen. 46:34). While living there, “the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them” (Exod. 1: 7). But after the death of Joseph, who had favor with the Pharaoh, the people of Israel became slaves in Egypt. Yet, “...the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread....” (Exod. 1:12). For 430 years the people of Israel lived under Egyptian rule (Exod. 12: 40-41). This was a growth period. By analogy with the ecological model of organizational change, it can be described as a period of exploitation.<sup>16</sup> The people of Israel became a large people group under the protection and provision (and oppression) of Egypt. They grew to such a size that they could become a nation of their own.

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<sup>16</sup> In an ecclesial setting this may be the early years of a new church plant, especially one supported by a healthy existing church. As the church grows, there is a general sense of optimism.

However, the Egyptian rulers saw them only as a convenient source of slave labor. Divine change would be required for the Israelites to fully realize the Abrahamic covenant. Strong leadership would be required to lead the people of Israel through the Exodus and wilderness experience, which may be compared to the “backside” of the ecological description of organizational transition.<sup>17</sup> The Lord identified Moses as that leader. Although God planned to liberate Israel, Moses was not yet ready for his leadership role. He first had to go through his own “Saturday” experience, exiled from his people, living for 40 years in the Midian desert (Exod. 2:11-25).

#### *Moses' Personal Saturday Experience*

Leadership during the exploitation phase (which can also be described as the expansion phase) of an organization is comparatively easy. There is momentum to build upon and this is evident in the story of the Israelites. After crossing the Jordan River under the leadership of Joshua, the people of Israel were once again in an exploitation phase. They had passed through the wilderness experience. Soon after entering the area of Canaan, the city of Jericho fell to the Israelites (Josh. 5:13-15 and Josh. 6). Thereafter, battle after battle was won as the Israelites conquered the lands promised to them. Joshua was mentored well by Moses. But Joshua did not need to go through the kind of personal Saturday experience required of Moses. Moses took a different leadership development path to lead a people through the wilderness. His personal journey in the Midian wilderness, was necessary to prepare him for the arduous leadership task that lay ahead.

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<sup>17</sup> This terminology again is used in describing the stages of the ecological model of organizational change.

His early life had not prepared him well. Moses led a privileged life, growing up in the house of Pharaoh as the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter (Exod. 2:10). However, as a young man, he killed another Egyptian, which precipitated his flight to Midian. There he married the daughter of a priest named Jethro. He lived as the servant shepherd of his father-in-law for forty years (Exod. 2:15-22). It was only after this period of exile, separated from his own people—this Saturday experience—that God was then able to call Moses out to be the great leader he would become. By the time God spoke to Moses at the burning bush, he had acquired considerable humility. His humility is evident in his first question to God: "What if they do not believe or listen to me..." (Exod. 4:1). In this question lies a self-realization that is fully based in humility.

Jesus and Paul had similar leadership training. Early in his ministry, Jesus too was sent into the wilderness for forty days and forty nights for a time of testing (Matt. 4:1-11). It was after this Saturday experience that Jesus began to preach (Matt. 4:17). The apostle Paul also spent time away after his conversion and temporary blindness, spending three years in Arabia (Gal. 1:17).

Organizations going through their own Saturday experience require a different kind of leadership: a Moses kind of leader. Many established congregations are in this dark place. The leader must be prepared for personal submersion into the Saturday experience. The leader who is not prepared should seek wise counsel from a leader who has gone through a Saturday experience. Leadership during this dark Saturday period does not have the same glory as leadership during the exploitation phase. The leader is not usually seen as a hero but often as the villain, the one to blame. It was only after his death that Moses was seen by the people of Israel as their great hero. Over and over during the

forty year wilderness experience, the Israelites complained to Moses: “What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt?”(Exodus 14:11). Seth Godin identifies the problem for twenty-first century leadership. “Leadership is scarce because few people are willing to go through the discomfort required to lead.”<sup>18</sup>

One way to prepare for Saturday leadership is to spend time on a consistent basis with the marginalized of the local community. This will involve getting to know individuals by name, learning their stories and being present with them. Greg Paul, the founder of Sanctuary Ministries in Toronto, has written *God in the Alley*, a poignant book about his experiences.<sup>19</sup> He describes the realities of this faithful presence: “Choosing to be the presence of Jesus in this manner isn’t easy. In fact, it’s a kind of death. This way of being requires me to increasingly deny myself and pick up my cross. It can be unpleasant lugging that thing around, and I drop it frequently.”<sup>20</sup> However, going through the difficult preparatory work of self-leadership is necessary to effectively lead others.

### **Leadership of Others**

#### *The Holy Saturday Experience of Separation and Death*

During his earthly ministry Jesus formed a small community of followers around the nucleus of the twelve men known as his disciples and, after his resurrection, as apostles. These men were in growing anticipation of divine change. A new Kingdom was unfolding with Jesus as its leader. The disciples argued about who was the greatest among them (Mark 9:33-34). James and John held visions of sitting next to Jesus in his

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<sup>18</sup> Seth Godin, *Tribes: We Need You to Lead Us* (New York: Penguin Books Ltd. 2008), 55.

<sup>19</sup> Greg Paul, *God in the Alley: Being and Seeing Jesus in a Broken World* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2004).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

glory (Mark 10:35-37). The entry of Jesus one last time into Jerusalem was celebratory and triumphant (Mark 11:1-11). One can imagine the hopeful feelings among the disciples and the other followers of Jesus.

And then everything changed. The grand entrance into Jerusalem led to the crucifixion of Jesus on Good Friday. Some disciples disappeared, others watched in disbelief from a distance, at a loss to understand current events. On the next day, the Sabbath—the day we call Holy Saturday—the new reality must have set in for the followers of Jesus. All of their dreams and aspirations for the new kingdom were shattered. As Jesus was now dead, they too were experiencing a form of death. The Gospel writers do not record anything about that dark day other than “they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment” (Luke 23:36).

One can imagine the thoughts that were going through their minds. “How could this have happened?” “What will we do now?” The Gospel of Luke records a post resurrection encounter on the road to Emmaus that provides some insight into the thoughts and hearts of His followers. In that encounter they shared the recent events that they thought changed everything: “...we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel” (Luke 24:20). The followers of Jesus were living through a Holy Saturday experience, and it was a dark, lonely, uncertain, and fearful place.

This scene plays out in churches during times of significant change. The vision held by the leader may be clear in his or her mind as one of necessary and important change. The leader may have clearly communicated his or her understanding of what that change should be. However, the followers will often have a different concept of change and in the process the leader may be metaphorically killed. This Saturday experience will

become a reality for most Saturday leaders who submit to the headship of Jesus for their lives and engage in his mission. For the leader, it will be very helpful to have others to share in this journey.

### *Leading from Behind*

There has been a trend in recent years calling for a different leadership style for the postmodern era. The more traditional “command and control” leadership style is being eschewed in favor of a more collaborative style. This style recognizes that the leader must build a team of leaders in order to be successful in transitioning an organization through difficult change. This change in leadership style is especially important for the local church.

Recognizing one’s own weaknesses is one of the important challenges for leaders of organizations in transition. It will be necessary for those weaknesses to be supported and strengthened by those who have complementary abilities. As well, leaders try to do too much on their own. Early in his leadership journey, Moses realized that he did not have strong communication skills. God heard his concerns and allowed Moses’ brother Aaron to share in leadership (Exod. 4:27). Aaron became the spokesperson in the negotiations with the Pharaoh (Exod. 5:1). Later, during the Exodus, Aaron often communicated with the people. He shared and assumed many of the administrative duties and he was chosen by God as the first High Priest for the Tabernacle (Exod. 28:1).

However, it soon became apparent that leading such a large group of people would require an even broader shared leadership structure. Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, noticed how overwhelming leading Israel had become for Moses. He suggested a new leadership model “...select capable men from all the people—men who fear God,

trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Have them serve as judges for the people....That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you” (Exod. 18:21-22). To his credit Moses took this great advice.<sup>21</sup> “He listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said” (Exod.18:24). Although it is important to share leadership it “must also be put in the right place, where it can be addressed by the relevant parties.”<sup>22</sup> In the leadership model proposed by Jethro, the leadership strengths of individuals were considered. Some were placed in leadership over great numbers, others over small numbers—all in relationship to their abilities.

Great leaders are always looking for ways to build up other leaders, mentor them and share their leadership with them. Moses provides a great model for mentorship. He brought Joshua alongside him and prepared him for his future role as the leader of Israel. It would be Joshua who would bring them across the Jordan River and lead them into the great battles for control of the Promised Land. A successful mentorship program is important for leaders of organizations that want to experience growth and development. Great leaders are mentored and act as mentors to others.

It will also be important for leaders to understand their individual gifting within the fivefold ministries of apostle, priest, evangelist, shepherd and teacher (Ephesians 4). The question must be asked: What apostolic gifting do I hold? Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchin suggest that much of the contemporary church has lost the apostle, the priest and

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<sup>21</sup> Buzzell, Sid, ed., *The Leadership Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 92.

<sup>22</sup> Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 128.

the evangelist from their congregations.<sup>23</sup> This is not because these gifts are not present but rather that the roles of the shepherd and teacher have been thought paramount.<sup>24</sup> Hirsch and Catchin argue persuasively and correctly that the missional church must recover all of the five gifts to be truly missional.<sup>25</sup> It will be important for the Saturday leader to assist in awakening these five-fold ministry gifts within the local church.

### **Leadership of the Organization**

#### *Believing in Your Congregation*

A leader will not be an effective catalyst for change if he or she does not fully believe in the congregation being led. The leader must sincerely believe in their capacity for change. This is an essential part of leadership that is submitted to following Jesus. The leader must recognize that the local church is God's church and not theirs. God taught Moses this important insight for the leadership that Moses would provide to Israel.

When Moses encountered Yahweh at the burning bush, he raised several objections to Yahweh's announcement that Moses was called to lead Israel out of Egypt. All of Moses' objections, save for one, focused on his own inadequacies to lead. However, in his third objection he anticipates that the people may question whether the Lord appeared to him (Exod. 4:1). Even though Moses was assured by God that his people would listen to him, he questioned that assurance. The Lord then provided Moses with three signs that could be used to demonstrate to the people of Israel that Moses was indeed called by God to be their leader. In the first sign, the shepherd's staff held by

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<sup>23</sup> Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchin, *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 7.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

Moses turned into a snake when thrown on the ground (Exod. 4:3). The third sign involved drawing water from the Nile River that then turned to blood (Exod. 4: 9). Neither the first nor the third sign directly impacted Moses' life. However, the second sign involved Moses personally. When he was told by the Lord to place his hand inside his cloak and remove it, his hand turned leprous (Exod. 4:6). Jonathan Sacks notes that, over the ages, Jewish sages observed and were curious about the fact that, while the first two signs were used by Moses and Aaron but the second sign was never used.<sup>26</sup> Scripture revealed leprosy was always a sign of punishment.<sup>27</sup> Through this personal sign, God taught Moses that he was not entitled, as the leader of Israel to lose faith in them. Rabbi Sacks summarizes: "A fundamental principle of Jewish leadership is intimated here for the first time: a leader does not need faith in himself, but he must have faith in the people he is to lead."<sup>28</sup>

This principle continues to be of significant importance for the leader of the local church, especially a church going through difficult challenges. On occasion, I have heard pastors exclaim in frustration words to the effect that "My congregation is hopeless, they simply will not change." But, if the leader does not believe in his or her own people, this will reveal itself in both word and deed. As well, change will indeed become impossible to achieve. Rabbi Sacks concludes:

Who is a leader? To this, the Jewish answer is, one who identifies with his or her people, mindful of their faults, to be sure, but convinced also of their potential greatness and their preciousness in the sight of God.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant & Conversation*, (Maggid Books & The Orthodox Union, 2010) 30.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 33.

Jesus had to believe in his disciples. Over and over there are examples of their inability to grasp their role in the mission of Jesus. Yet Jesus was patient with them and believed in them. This is an important truth for all leaders to understand, perhaps even more critical for the local church. As a faith community formed under the guiding teaching of Scripture, the church lives under the headship of Jesus. Leaders of the local church must also submit their leadership to Jesus, trusting that Jesus will come alongside them.

#### *Leading through the Saturday Experience*

Over and over, in the face of each new hardship, the Israelites would think back to their days in Egypt and express their wish to return. In doing so, they were attacking the leadership of Moses. This is also what contemporary leaders of transition experience. The difficulty is that it requires what Heifetz and Linsky describe as *adaptive change* by those who are part of an organization: “Adaptive change stimulates resistance because it challenges people’s habits, beliefs, and values. It asks them to take a loss, experience uncertainty....<sup>30</sup> The Israelites felt such loss and uncertainty.

The Scriptural account of the Exodus journey paints a graphic picture of the leadership challenges for a local church in transition. For Moses, communicating to Israel the vision God shared with him was only the first challenge. Thereafter, Moses continued, over and over, to remind the people of where they came from and the vision God had for their future. It was the cry of the people that moved God to deliver Israel from their bondage in Egypt. He listened to their cry. But it was also necessary for Moses

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 30.

to hear the people and to understand their concerns, hopes and dreams as his own. Had he not experienced his own season of exile and humiliation, it would have been difficult for him to truly empathize with their plight.

Throughout his tenure as a leader, Moses demonstrated the capacity to maintain faith in the vision despite the great obstacles that continually presented themselves. When the Israelites saw the Egyptians pursuing them with chariots and horses, Moses urged the people “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today” (Exodus 14:13). Seth Godin makes the astute point: “Once you choose to lead, you’ll be under huge pressure to reconsider your choice, to compromise, to dumb it down, or to give it up.”<sup>31</sup> Moses challenged Israel to “stand firm”. The leader of a local church must maintain her or her faith in God and his vision. The leader must also regularly communicate faith and hope for restoration and renewal. In this way the leader balances the people’s present reality with their hope for the future.

#### *Integrating the Saturday Experience with the Easter Sunday Reality*

The Lord promised Moses: “I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey...” (Exod. 3:8). It was this “Easter Sunday” reality of hope and restoration that kept Moses going through the forty difficult years in the wilderness. In the midst of the exilic experience, the prophets Ezekiel and Second Isaiah held out a similar promise of restoration. The challenge for the leader of the local church is to constantly hold out the promise of renewal and restoration—both for the local church and individual followers of Jesus. This hope is not for numerical growth and/or financial

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<sup>31</sup> Godin, *Tribes*, 147.

security but rather for the knowledge that the church functions in line with the original vision for the church, as submitted followers of Christ.

### *Creative Destruction and Creative Construction*

There are times when an organization must look within and acknowledge that things are not right and that steps must be taken to initiate corrective change. In the ecological model, this has been described as “creative destruction.”<sup>32</sup> This action is coupled with what is correspondingly described as “creative construction.”<sup>33</sup> The leader will play an important role for the church to realize both.

Perhaps the church has experienced an amazing run of growth and success. Membership has increased, the building campaign was successful, the mortgage is almost paid off and momentum is driving them forward. But something no longer feels right. A plateau has been reached. There is a comfort level that has set in. The church is focused inward. This may be a time for looking at what needs to be let go. These are the metaphorical “temples” that interfere with the true ministry and mission of the local church. What needs to die? Is it an attitude? Is it the building? Is the culture getting stale? Is the church all it is called to be? Is it truly an exilic, missional community? Is the surrounding community being blessed and changed? If the answer is “no”, perhaps there needs to be some creative destruction of the historical direction and culture of the

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<sup>32</sup> J. A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942) and Allen J. Scott, “Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Industrial Development: Geography and creative Field Revisited,” *Small Business Economics*, vol. 26, 2006, 1–24. There are numerous articles written about “creative destruction,” a term originally developed by J. A. Schumpeter. In some contexts it describes the result of external forces on a capitalist organization. But it has also been used to describe self-initiated corrective action by initiating a crisis.

<sup>33</sup> Rajshree Agarwal, David Audretsch, and M. B. Sarkar, “The Process of Creative Construction: Knowledge Spillovers, Entrepreneurship, and Economic Growth,” *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*, vol. 1, 2007, 263. In this article, the authors also provide a helpful summary of the meaning and study of the process of creative destruction.

church.<sup>34</sup> And, equally important, before embarking upon any organizational creative destruction, a leader must examine her or his life, to be confident of entering into such a challenging period. The question must be asked: What do I need to change and reconstruct in my personal life?

The people of Israel experienced a form of creative destruction leading to exile. They had a great period of growth and success after crossing the Jordan River. They experienced great military success. They had great leaders and leaders who had failed. The city of Jerusalem became a world class city with a beautiful Temple. People came from many countries to visit. But there was a complacency that set in. Jehovah was no longer a priority. The call on the people of Israel to be the light of the world was a distant memory. So God decided some creative destruction was necessary. The prophet Jeremiah describes it this way: “Therefore, this is what the Lord says: ‘I am about to hand this city over to the Babylonians and to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon who will capture it’” (Jer. 32:28).

The chronicler recorded the actual event with few words. “He (Nebuchadnezzar) carried into exile in Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the kingdom of Persia came into power” (2 Chron. 36: 20). God permitted the exile because the people of Israel forgot their calling (2 Chron. 36:15-17).<sup>35</sup> They worshipped and sacrificed to foreign gods. They forgot about

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<sup>34</sup> Recently, an email received from Leadership Network concerning the Rivertree Christian Church near Canton, Ohio, demonstrated this principle. They had accumulated a large plot of land and held \$70 Million in the Bank to build a state of the art new campus. The senior pastor, Greg Nettle, had a special awakening that the church should not proceed but instead use these funds for externally focused ministry. The congregation agreed. They thereafter continued to hold multiple services and spread out over different locations. [www.rivertreechristian.com](http://www.rivertreechristian.com).

<sup>35</sup> Hosea, Chapters 5, 9 and 10.

justice. In order to recapture God's call on Israel, it was necessary for the people to again go through a Saturday experience. They had to reflect once more on their purpose and to whom they belonged.

It was probably during the exilic period that some of the greatest creativity occurred—the writing and re-writing of much of the Old Testament Scriptures, and a new approach to worship through synagogues.<sup>36</sup> “During and after the exile, the exiled Judahites developed an unprecedented creative energy that resulted in the final editing of the Pentateuch, of the Deuteronomistic work of history (the Books of Samuel and Kings), of many of the prophetic books and also in the composition of new literature (such as the Chronistic works of history, i.e., Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles) that reflects the concerns of the returnees from Babylon often more directly than the older literature.”<sup>37</sup>

The people discovered that God could be present for them without Temple worship. The Law of Moses was preserved as part of the education system. The priest Ezra, who was instrumental in leading a portion of the exiled people back to Jerusalem from Babylon is described as, “well versed in the Law of Moses, which the Lord, the God of Israel had given” (Ezra 7:6). The prophet Ezekiel writes during the exilic period offering hope for the future, “very skilfully trying to *recreate a sense of trust* that God still worked as he always had, and that he still spoke with as much authority and power as

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<sup>36</sup> Catholic Encyclopaedia, “Synagogue.” “It was probably during the Babylonian captivity that the synagogue became a national feature of Hebrew worship.”  
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14379b.htm> (accessed April 21, 2007).

<sup>37</sup> Michael Zank, “Babylonian Exile and Beyond,”  
<http://www.bu.edu/mzank/Jerusalem/cp/exret.htm> (accessed April 21, 2007).

he always had.”<sup>38</sup> The vision of the dry bones that come to life speaks powerfully to the plan God had for his people (Ezek. 37:1-14).

Could it be that God has a similar plan for the local church? There are growing numbers within the church who are seeing this vision of new life for the exilic church. However, any implementation of creative destruction must be followed by a plan for creative construction. The key is to be aware that the two processes can be complementary. For creative construction, the leaders need to identify all of the positive areas where God is at work within the church community and in the local surrounding community and to build upon these positive features.

### *Pastoring the Local Church*

As Alan Lewis suggests, most of us do not voluntarily enter into the Holy Saturday experience except when our lives take a turn into a place of deep loss, crisis, or tragedy.<sup>39</sup> Yet that is precisely where God calls his followers—to share in the “death” experiences of our brothers and sisters. Lewis explains: “Easter Saturday existence, then, lived in any circumstances or conditions, will embrace the suffering of others and one’s complicity in the fallenness of which their pain and death are such a bitter harvest.”<sup>40</sup> This vision requires leaders of the Saturday church to hold the crisis event (or the former ethos) and the new vision for the future in dynamic tension. They will remind the church where it came from but invite a reconceived new birth—a new ethos or way of

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<sup>38</sup> Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament*, 387.

<sup>39</sup> Lewis, *Between Cross*, 405.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 423.

understanding its mission to emerge. “Skilful leaders nurture a sense of urgency in their congregations.”<sup>41</sup>

### *Pastoring the Local Community*

Each January, my wife Kathy and I take a winter vacation in Taos, New Mexico. While there we attend a small United Methodist church. The church building itself is extremely modest, rebuilt as a meeting place from a former garage, a former bar and a former cafe. The Sunday worshipping community is never more than 50. Yet this small community of faith, with its Saturday leadership, year in and year out makes an enormous impact on its community, experiencing so powerfully what Hunter describes as “faithful presence.” From its Sunday bulletin (January 30<sup>th</sup> 2011) we read that “Shared Table helped 316 adults & 161 children this past (week) distribution with food commodities, basic health-care items, smiles and goodwill....”<sup>42</sup> In 2010, the bulletin notes that over 12,000 were served! The key to this ministry is the leadership of its pastor who is always on the frontlines serving the local people out of what the church describes as its “shared table.”<sup>43</sup>

On this particular Sunday, the pastor used the metaphor of a sail boat to describe the ministry of their church. Most people coming to the area only see the beautiful part of the boat above the water. They don’t see the substantial part of the boat below the water, representing all those of their community who are living on the margins. These are the

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<sup>41</sup> Nelson, *Borderland Churches*, 19.

<sup>42</sup> El Pueblito United Methodist Church bulletin, Taos, NM, January 30, 2011. In the fourth week of January, 2012, the Shared Table served 450 adults, 165 children and 41 infants. El Pueblito United Methodist church bulletin, Taos, NM, January 29, 2012.

<sup>43</sup> Chandra Johnson, “Everybody’s Welcome; El Pueblito Celebrates 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversay,” *Taos News* (Taos, N.M.) December 2, 2010, <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-243535791.html> (accessed February 2, 2011).

people this small church is faithfully present to each week. This church demonstrates so powerfully that size is not necessary to be effective. The pastor regularly receives calls from those in need in the local community. He embodies the quality Reggie McNeal suggests is required; “Missional congregational pastors now pastor the community, not just the church.”<sup>44</sup>

*Special Challenge: Leading through Conflict*

Certainly the most difficult challenge for the Saturday leader will be to effectively and constructively address conflict, whether that is inter-personal conflict or conflict within the church. Ideally, Christians are truly following Jesus and there should be any conflict. Nothing could be further from reality. An examination of the New Testament reveals many instances of conflict that even include the apostle Paul and his colleagues.<sup>45</sup> Yet many leaders work hard at avoiding conflict, often diminishing themselves in the process. This can result in an escalating breakdown of the church.<sup>46</sup> Therefore the Saturday leader must acknowledge conflict and address it openly, honestly and transparently. It will be important to first understand the reason for the conflict and to ask key questions: What is leading to the difference of opinion? What is the perspective of the other person? Why is it different? Remember, someone else’s perspective will be held as strongly as one’s own.

Robert Kegan points out that conflict resolution in a postmodern context is even harder than it was during the modern period. “Postmodernism suggests a kind of ‘conflict

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<sup>44</sup> McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, 135.

<sup>45</sup> Rick Rouse and Craig Van Gelder, *A Field Guide for the Missional Congregation*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008), 97–99.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 95–107.

resolution' in which the Palestinian discovers her own Israeli-ness, the rich man discovers his poverty, the woman discovers the man inside her."<sup>47</sup> The temptation many pastors fall victim to is avoidance. The ultimate form of avoidance is to seek a position elsewhere. Any withdrawal by a pastor in the midst of conflict will surely result in significant and lasting damage to the church community.

### **A Vision for Continuing Exile**

To be clear, the vision a Saturday leader has for a Saturday church is not that it will be restored to a Christendom place of power and influence. The church as a community is not looking to move out of the exilic Saturday experience. Rather, the church must embrace a place of exile from mainstream society as the preferred future. It will maintain its exilic, temple-less, missional posture, sharing in the exilic experience of those within the local church and in the surrounding community. It will maintain a posture of humility and holiness. It is from this place that the church can remain faithfully present in its community as an ecclesial people of hope and restoration. Success will be a transition into continuing exile away from power and strength into a place of vulnerability and weakness. It is the paradoxical reality for the Christian church within a fallen world that waits for ultimate restoration upon the return of Jesus.

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<sup>47</sup> Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 320.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

There are multiple applications for the theology of Holy Saturday. The Saturday experience may be a consequence of a crisis or significant change in the life of the church. This critical event may interrupt, in whole or in part, the continued expansion phase of the church. The challenges may derive in part from changing demographics in the local community. Or, more broadly speaking, as addressed herein, the crisis may result from the collective impact of social and cultural changes in the society including the impact of post-modernism and living in the post-Christendom period. As a result, the local church may see this either as a crisis or an opportunity to reconceive its future as a community of faith.

A principal locus of this dissertation has been on “creative destruction and construction.” In this sense the local church must continue to examine its calling as the Body of Christ and periodically reassess its priorities. It must move into the Holy Saturday experience of our Lord. It does so by sitting beside and sharing in the death experiences of those of its community who are marginalized, suffering loss, pain, and injustice, just as Christ suffered on the Cross. While we may think of those within the community who are most obviously marginalized, everyone, at some stage of his or her life will suffer through a wilderness experience. Therefore the ministry of the Saturday church extends to everyone, within its own church community and to the surrounding community, locally and globally. In the marvelous tension between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, the church can offer a vision of reconciliation and restoration offered by God in the mystery of Easter. The role of the Saturday leader is to always bridge the

separation between Good Friday and Easter Sunday in the midst of living in the experience of Saturday, always holding out the promise of restoration and renewal in the face of relinquishing what needs to be left behind. The examples of relinquishment and restoration run throughout Scripture: the Israelites leaving Egypt, the exiles to Babylon, the early Christians living in exile. Yet the pull of the former life is very strong. For the contemporary church it is the stronghold of the Christendom world upon the life and ministry of the local church. The way of Christendom will continue to be the easy default in challenging times of adaptive change. And the leader will constantly need to be aware of and resist the powerful force of Christendom upon the ministry of the exilic and temple-less church.

Transitioning a church into becoming a Saturday church will require a special kind of Saturday leadership. Saturday leaders are those who enter into their own personal wilderness to examine their lives against the call of Jesus upon his followers. Saturday leaders are leaders who personally commit to submitting their lives to Christ and living their lives in the context of Holy Saturday. They are leaders who are fully engaged in the church as well as the surrounding community. They are mindful of the teaching in 1 Peter to live holy lives. They will hold their communities in dynamic tension between the death experience of Good Friday and Holy Saturday and the glorious resurrection promise of a restored community coming out of Easter Sunday. They spend their lives living and sharing in the Saturday experience of the people in their community. Their prayers and words of encouragement are in the knowledge of the good news of the resurrection. Their hopes are for those within the exiled, temple-less, missional church to actively sense

where Jesus is already at work in the community and join Him in offering hope and restoration to those in the midst of their own Saturday experience.

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