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Positive deviance : empowering ecclesial contextualization with theological praxis

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GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY

POSITIVE DEVIANCE:
EMPOWERING ECCLESIAL CONTEXTUALIZATION
WITH THEOLOGICAL PRAXIS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
DOUGLAS WAYNE BALZER

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

D.Min. Dissertation

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

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has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on March 15, 2012
as fully adequate in scope and quality as a dissertation
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics and Future Studies

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To Jan, my wife

You walked with me through this journey.

Encouraged me at every turn, supported me spiritually,

financially and emotionally. You kept me on track

and focused on the goal. Thank you for your all

love and support.

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ABSTRACT

Positive Deviance: Empowering Ecclesial Contextualization with Theological Praxis

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2012
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The purpose of this paper is to learn from alternative missional forms of ecclesia that have created and sustain ecclesial communities where others have failed amid marginalized people in the Portland, Oregon, Metro area. This is accomplished through researching the practices and strategies used to engage the Gospel within these communities by alternative missional ecclesias. It further explores if these strategies and practices coincide with the concept of the Positive Deviance Approach for dealing with adaptive challenges for church planting.

Chapter 1 explores the relationship of the contemporary church and the alternative missional church amid marginalized people in the Portland. Chapter 2 explores the biblical materials in the Gospels for the praxis of Jesus Christ amid marginalized people. Chapter 3 explores Church history in Acts focused upon the practice of contextualization and theological praxis. Chapter 4 explores if a theological basis for practicing the positive deviance approach in ecclesial contexts creates contextualization with theological praxis. Chapter 5 describes the research methodology and Chapter 6 presents the research analysis and recommendations for the adoption of the Positive Deviance Approach. The paper seeks to record the successful application of the Positive Deviance Approach in the ecclesial contexts.

Words: 195

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

*And the Church must be forever building,
And always decaying,
And always being restored.*¹

--T.S. Eliot

Foreign travel is one of the best ways to experience intractable cultural differences. For example, when traveling to the United Kingdom I experienced the difficulty of driving on the left hand side of the road. “Are you nervous?” was the first question the driving instructor asked. As I sat in the driver’s seat behind the steering wheel that was on the right hand side of the car the thought of driving on the left hand side of the road was overwhelming. “I’m absolutely freakin’ out, none of this feels right, but let’s do this.” Anxiety filled my mind and a large amount of adrenalin filled my body. The pedals were all the same as in the U.S., clutch, break and gas pedal were all present, only on the wrong side of the car. The gear-shift lever was still in the center, but I would have to shift with my left hand. It all felt awkward and out of place, unnatural. “This just isn’t right!” Andrew, my London friend, laughed at me and saying, “Doug, you’re not in Kansas anymore!” He was right. It was a foreign land and I was thrust into experiencing one of the greatest cultural difficulties Americans encounter when visiting the UK; driving on the wrong side of the road.

Fortunately, the driving lesson started out in an area specifically designed for teaching Americans to drive. Everything was marked clearly, the lanes with arrows to indicate correct direction, the street signs that would be encountered and then there was the dreaded counter-flow roundabout. The counter-flow roundabout is definitely not for the faint

¹ Thomas Stearns Eliot, *Collected Poems, 1909-1962* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1963), 153.

of heart. Before visiting the UK I used to think that the only real big difference was simply driving on the opposite side of the road . . . it's not. The rules of the game are totally different. Everything about driving in the UK went against all that I knew and understood about driving. Finally, I am ready to experience real time traffic. Despite my objections, Andrew and the instructor took me out to an area where they felt the traffic was lighter and had a couple counter-flow roundabouts. I was asked to drive from one end of a five-mile section through two counter-flow roundabouts turn around and come back to the starting point. Did I mention roundabouts are definitely not for the faint of heart?

The experience was one of the most intimidating of my life. The straight sections were great, the corners were tricky and I ended up in the right hand lane a couple of time. During this first foray into traffic it was in the roundabouts where Andrew and the instructor screamed like children begging for their lives. One recommendation here, avoid the Lorries (the trucks), they are huge and intimidating and frankly one should avoid hitting one at all costs. It took a few weeks to become a novice driver in the UK. If I had not taken the time to orient myself to this intractable culture difference of driving in the UK the results could have great injury others. The worst-case scenario might have been death.

The experience of learning to drive in the UK forced me to feel the deep frustration and discomfort of what it means to be completely outside of my comfort zone. As wrong as it might seem to drive on the left, the UK will not change for the convenience of American. Nor should we expect them too. Yet, this is exactly what the contemporary institutional church expects of people from marginalized cultures. When dealing with intractable cultural differences the church believes they are able to easily overcome the barriers, but in reality the practices and strategies the church employs are like an American learning to drive in the UK.

The danger lies in the idea that the church works on a one size fits all theory that eventually causes spiritual death in those who don't understand the culture. The rules of the game are totally different. The church is experiencing intractable cultural differences that resemble the experience of an American learning to drive in the UK. The church in the North American context is struggling due to its inability to connect with the emerging cultural climate. Cultural change has set the course of the church in a pattern of cultural irrelevance and decline.

The institutional church in North American is experiencing decline. Several factors contribute to the decline; postmodernism and post-Christendom appear to be the principal contributors. While the population continues to grow in North America, church attendance is severely diminishing, so much so that if the current trend continues by the year 2050 church attendance will be fifty percent of what it was in the 1990's.² If the number of people attending church is in such a decline amid the general population, what is transpiring amid the marginalized³ of North American society? The change in church attendance amid the general population has implications of reflecting what has and is transpiring amid the marginalized people of society. This paper asks the questions, what is transpiring amid marginalized people in relationship to the establishment of ecclesia and how might ecclesial

² David Olson, *The American Church in Crisis: Groundbreaking Research Based On A National Database Of Over 200,000 Churches* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Zondervan, 2008), 15–17.

³ Marginalized or marginalization involves a spectrum of definitions – marginal people are often portrayed as outsiders, but not limited to race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic minorities, the disabled, the homeless, economic status or class or cast, Goths, anarchists, Christarchists and are not confined to groups that are victimized due to sexual practices or engagement in the sex trade. Marginal groups may consist of people who are trying to resist assimilation of their cultural heritage. Marginal groups may and do consists of individuals and people who live on the margins of the mainstream society in which they reside. Marginal people are defined as; Nonmainstream people who are at the fringes of their own culture.

leadership be inspired to adopt the Positive Deviance Approach,⁴ in order to empower contextualization of the Gospel with theological praxis amid marginalized people. No one appears to have written on the context of the marginalized and how would it look to create church amidst them. The thesis of this paper is that alternate missional ecclesia is able to create and sustain ecclesial communities amid marginalized people in society, specifically where other ecclesial methodologies have experienced more failure than success.

The alternate missional ecclesia, through their uninformed use of the Positive Deviance Approach and with their unique strategies and practices provide support for empowering contextualization with theological praxis, this creates and sustains ecclesial communities amid marginalized people. There exist a number of authors who are pessimistic about the future of the institutional church creating and sustaining ecclesial communities amid marginalized people due to their experience of success and failure.⁵ The backdrop for this pessimism is illuminated by the historical success of the church as a missional movement

⁴ Examples of the successful application of the Positive Deviance Approach include the reduction of Female Genital Mutilation Practices in Egypt; Save the Children successfully used the PD to combat the issue of childhood malnutrition in Vietnam; In Ethiopia the PD Approach has resulted in allowing girls to gain access to education, The Positive Deviance Approach is defined as a strength based approach that is applied within a community where people (Positive Deviants) whose practices and strategies are successful in creating solutions and cultural bridging where others with the same resources fail are sought out, R Tuhus-Dubrow, “The Power of Positive Deviants: A promising new tactic for changing communities from the inside.,” *Boston Globe*, November 29, 2009; Jerry Sternin and Robert Choo, “The Power of Positive Deviancy.,” *Harvard Business Review* 78, no. 1 (January 2000): 14–15; Jerry Sternin, Richard Pascale, and Marshall Fisher, “Power of Positive Deviance: How Improbable Innovators Solve Intractable Problems.,” *Harvard Business School Press Books* (July 2010), 1.

⁵ For a few examples see Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom* (Carlisle [England]: Paternoster, 2004); Michael Riddell, *Threshold of the Future: Reforming the Church in the Post-Christian West* (SPCK, 1998); Darrell L. Guder and Lois Barrett, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998); Alan Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith: Faith Journeys Beyond the Churches* (SPCK, 2002); Ed Stetzer and David Putman, *Breaking the Missional Code* (B&H Publishing Group, 2006); Frank Viola and George Barna, *Pagan Christianity: Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices* (Tyndale House Publishers, 2008); Brian D. McLaren and Tony Campolo, *Adventures in Missing the Point* (Zondervan, 2006); Eddie Gibbs and Ian Coffey, *Church Next: Quantum Changes in Christian Ministry* (InterVarsity, 2001).

spanning the globe into contemporary times having originated from the humble beginnings with a handful of followers, specifically the twelve disciples.

The Problem

The problem is found in the sense that postmodernism is an overwhelming cultural paradigm shift rendering the contemporary church culturally irrelevant, especially irrelevant amid marginalized people. The postmodern shift has effectively moved western culture away from the formulation of propositional and confessional faith, resulting in a cultural crisis amid the modernist within the contemporary church. Walter Truett Anderson asserts, “We are in the midst of a great, confusing, stressful and enormously promising historical transition, and it has to do with a change not so much in what we believe as in how we believe.”⁶ The praxis of the contemporary and institutional church has been to function in the culture that was produced by modernity. With the postmodern shift the mode of replication church planting is no longer effective. In their book *Hope from the Margins*, Stuart Murray and Anne Wilkinson-Hayes observe the following reasons why the contemporary and institutional church has experienced fewer success and more failures, they assert,

- Most churches which were able to plant another church early in the 1990s have not yet recovered sufficiently to do so again;
- Few newly-planted churches have yet grown quickly enough to plant another church;
- The dominance of personal-intensive models of church planting have discouraged smaller churches from becoming involved;
- A disturbing number of church plants have failed, have remained small and weak, or have attracted only those who were already Christians;

⁶ Walt Anderson, *The Truth About the Truth: De-confusing and Re-constructing the Postmodern World* (G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1995), 2.

- Church planting has generally been restricted to areas where churches are already flourishing, leaving many urban and rural areas untouched.⁷

Murray and Wilkinson's assertion indicates the context that the contemporary institutional church now occupies is within a postmodern society; the conventional mode of church planting is proving to be ineffective amid marginalized people. Christianity no longer is in a position of dominance in North America. Tom Clegg and Warren Bird assert this conclusion,

The inescapable conclusion is that we must throw out any notion that God is truly at the center of the church's heat in North America. The shift in society's view of the church has resulted in the marginalization of the church and the secularization of society. Christianity has lost its place at the center of American life. Christians must learn how to live the gospel as a distinct people who no longer occupy the center of society. We must learn to build relational bridges that win a hearing.⁸

Clegg and Bird's conclusion is reflective of the serious decline amid denominations and members in the contemporary institutional church. Those starting new movements are recognizing that North America is a mission field. Darrell L. Guder observes the North American experience as it moves rapidly into post-Christendom,

The United States is still, by all accounts, a very religious society. The pollsters affirm that Americans and Canadians believe in God, pray regularly, and consider themselves religious. But they find less and less reason to express their faith by joining a Christian church."⁹

It may be concluded by the shift in expressing faith that church planting is no longer a carbon copy or imitation endeavor where a church replicates itself in another location. The Decade of Evangelism initiated in the 1990's represents an erroneous assumption that society accepts the conventional mode of ecclesia with its basic features intact, but seeded into new soil

⁷ Stuart Murray and Anne Wilkinson-Hayes, *Hope From the Margins: New Ways of Being Church* (Grove, 2000), 4-5.

⁸ Tom Clegg and Warren Bird, *Lost in America: How You and Your Church can Impact the World Next Door* (Loveland Colo.: Group, 2001), 36, 57-58.

⁹ Guder and Barrett, *Missional Church*, 1.

would yield a new crop of followers. The erroneous thinking of the contemporary institutional church may be traced to earlier times when the church was believed to be the center of the community. Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch in their book, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, address the misconception,

Many of the new Protestant church movements of recent years are simply variations on the old Christendom mode. Whether they place their emphasis on new worship styles, expressions of the Holy Spirit's power, evangelism to seekers, or bible teaching, these so-called new movements still operate out of the fallacious assumption that the church belongs firmly in the town square, that is, at the heart of Western culture. And if they begin with this mistaken belief about their position in Western society, all their church planting, all their reproduction will simply mirror this misapprehension.¹⁰

The efforts of the contemporary church have been to repackage itself and all of its activities in what it perceives to be relevant to and with postmodern culture. The result has been the propagation of church planting strategies from organizations and institutions that encourage following of various models resulting in replication of other churches. Author and church historian Leonard Sweet writes about this propagation of contemporary church planting models, "We've been Pullingerized, Wimberized, Hybelized, Neighbourized, Warrenized in our pursuit of what God's 'up to.'"¹¹ Sweet rightly indicates the prevailing issue is finding what God is "up to" through attempting to replicate another churches successes in other contexts, essentially being a carbon copy that lacks any originality that may relate to the cultural context of the church plant. The church is being challenged to enter into all cultural contexts with their uniqueness and identity.

¹⁰ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 17.

¹¹ Leonard Sweet, *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and the Church: Missional, Relational, Incarnational*, 1st ed. (Colorado Springs CO: David C. Cook, 2009), 24.

The Challenge

The challenge of the 21st century Church in the West is its relevance to its immediate cultural context, because ecclesia is inseparably connected to the culture it finds itself within.¹² The world craves relevant and genuine incarnational community and the institutional church has failed to deliver it. Frost and Hirsch write, “We must admit that Christendom, particularly its ecclesiological and its missiological manifestations, amounts to something of a failed experiment.”¹³ It is no wonder there is a movement within postmodernism to express itself through a willingness to challenge contemporary and institutional expressions of church. Sweet in his endorsement of the book, *The Shaping of Things to Come* writes,

For the first time we in the West are living in what has been called a ‘post-Christendom era.’ Most people throughout the Western world have seen what the Church has to offer, and they have found it wanting. The current credibility gap has made it hard to communicate the gospel with clarity and authenticity. Paradoxically, this is the case even though it is currently a time of almost unprecedented openness to the issues of God, faith, and meaning. This is a time when the need for, and relevance of, the gospel has seldom been greater, but the relevance of the Church has seldom been less. If ever there was a time for innovative missionary effort in the West, it is now.¹⁴

The postmodern discontent challenges the contemporary and institutional churches praxis and has led to the missional church movement.¹⁵ The missional church movement functions through the perspective that Christ followers are to posture themselves to live out the Gospel in culture, as an incarnational community of Christ followers versus the Attractional,

¹² Paul G. Hiebert and Eloise Hiebert Meneses, *Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches In Band, Tribal, Peasant, and Urban Societies* (Baker Books, 1995), 41.

¹³ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 15.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ For more information concerning the history of the missional church Brad Brisco delineates the development of the movement in relationship to Western culture; “History of Missional Church « Missional Church Network”, n.d., <http://missionalchurchnetwork.com/history-of-missional-church/>, (accessed August 23, 2011).

Propositional and Colonial system of the contemporary and institutional church.¹⁶ George Peters asserts, “If man is to be reached, he must be reached within his own culture.”¹⁷ Church culture in the West has followed the pattern of “Attractional, Propositional and Colonial”¹⁸ as its default system throughout the modernist period. Sweet observes, “The attractional church thinks that if they build it, and build it hip and cool, people will come.”¹⁹ The missional church movement is concerned with what does it really mean to be the ecclesia of Christ in culture? The emerging American mission field with its postmodern, post-Christendom, its paganism and neo-paganism, diversity and pluralist shift has led many in the missional movement to question the formation of the church’s ecclesiology. Craig Van Gelder, noted professor of congregational mission, asserts the challenge of the changing culture requires a reassessment of ecclesiology,

This involves the issue of *ecclesiology* (*ecclesia* = ‘church’; *-ology* = ‘the study of’). In the midst of our changing world, we are in constant need of continuing to engage in the study of the church, to explore its nature, to understand its creation and continuing formation, and to carefully examine its purpose and ministry.²⁰

One of the most prominent missiologists to emerge in the conversation about the issue of ecclesiology is Lesslie Newbigin.²¹ His ideologies’ concerning what has become known as

¹⁶ *Missional* is defined as people or “individuals actively committed to living a ‘sent’ life in the context of community.” *Incarnational*: “. . . the posture, tone, motives, and heart of Jesus; those who physically represent him in a particular location.” Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom: Creating Incarnational Community: The Posture and Practices of Ancient Church Now*, 1st ed. (San Francisco CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008), xi; Sweet, 17–21.

¹⁷ George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Moody Press, 1984), 163.

¹⁸ Sweet, 18.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Craig Van Gelder, *The Missional Church and Denominations: Helping Congregations Develop a Missional Identity* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 2.

²¹ For a biographical background see Lesslie Newbigin and Paul Weston, *Lesslie Newbigin: Missionary Theologian: a reader* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006); George R. Hunsberger, *Bearing the Witness of the Spirit: Lesslie Newbigin’s Theology of Cultural Plurality* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998);

the “*missional church conversation*” has helped to largely form the missional theology. He questioned the churches methodology for engaging culture in the West, he writes, “What would be involved in a missionary encounter between the gospel and this whole way of perceiving, thinking, and living that we call ‘modern Western Culture?’”²² Newbigin helped provide a renewed reflection on the issue of the ecclesial expression in the western cultural context. Sweet describes the construct of the missional church’s identity as it seeks to express itself in emerging cultures. He constructs this in the acrostic MRI, Missional, Relational and Incarnational. Sweet asserts, “Missional is the mind of God. Mission is where God’s head’s at. Relational is the heart of God. Relationship is where God’s heart is. Incarnational is the hands of God. Incarnation is what God’s hands are up to.”²³ All this has led to tension filled conversations about the postmodern and post-Christian culture that has lost interest in the church and how it intersects with mainstream culture, but of even greater concern than the mainstream culture are the culturally marginalized for whom Jesus was concerned.

Church at the Margins of Culture

The communities at the margins of the mainstream culture represent the greatest challenge for the church in the spread of the gospel and the greatest resistance to the institutional church. George G. Hunter III, distinguished professor of church growth and evangelism, writes about the angst of the paradigm shift and the reaction of the church,

James M. Hunt, *Lesslie Newbigin: Apologete to Our Postmodern Society* (Wake Forest University. Dept. of Religion, 1995).

²² Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to The Greeks* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1986), 1.

²³ Sweet, 29.

The Church, in the Western world, faces populations who are increasingly “secular” — people with no Christian memory, who don’t know what we Christians are talking about. These populations are increasingly “urban” — and out of touch with God’s “natural revelation.” These populations are increasingly “postmodern”; they have graduated from Enlightenment ideology and are more peer driven, feeling driven, and “right-brained” than their forebears. These populations are increasingly “neo-barbarian”; they lack “refinement” or “class,” and their lives are often out of control. These populations are increasingly receptive — exploring worldview options from Astrology to Zen — and are often looking “in all the wrong places” to make sense of their lives and find their soul’s true home.

In the face of this changing Western culture, many Western Church leaders are in denial; they plan and do church as though next year will be 1957. Furthermore, most of the Western Church leaders who are not in denial do not know how to engage the epidemic numbers of secular, postmodern, neo-barbarians outside (and inside) their churches.²⁴

The cultural divide between the church with its modernist source and the shift to postmodernism has resulted in an inability to continue business as usual, yet this is exactly what the institutional church continues to do. The cultural shift to postmodernism and post-Christendom has created a cultural transition and a struggle for identity amid the institutional churches. The resulting tension has created dismay for the institutional church in its efforts.

Halter and Smay,

We’ve worked so hard for so little, and we don’t know what else to try. We’ve tried Graham crusades, Promise Keepers, Willow Creek church, Saddlebacks’ four bases, the “small group” movement in every conceivable arrangement, Alpha, 40-Days of Everything, and house church. Yet we continue to lose the people we have while failing to reach the ones we don’t have.²⁵

The tensions of the inherited modes of church have not satisfied the spiritual yearnings of the marginal and sub-cultures resulting in diminished congregational size and lackluster results in church planting. Ecclesia at the margin seeks to move beyond the institutional church’s dynamics. Stuart Murray notes that the emerging church focuses upon three crucial

²⁴ George G. Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity can Reach the West. . . Again* (Abingdon Press, 2000), 9.

²⁵ Halter and Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom*, 16.

components of church through “refocusing mission . . . reconfiguring community . . . refreshing worship.”²⁶ The critical endeavor of the church needs to move away from its modernist mooring within the mainstream of society to the margins. Issues such as “cultural exegesis and reflection on mission”²⁷ are shaping the thinking of the missional church movement as it engages those at the margins of culture.

Rethinking ecclesia at the margins has resulted in genuine, culturally relevant ecclesial expressions, previously referred to as alternative missional ecclesia. Murray makes an observation about the appearance of ecclesia amid marginalized people, “. . . in networks and sub-cultures. Churches are emerging among science-fiction buffs, surfers, Goths, homeless people, transvestites, many ethnic minorities and youth cultures.”²⁸ The alternative missional ecclesia at the margins has moved away from institutional buildings and the trappings that come with them. Murray writes about this observation, “They are emerging in cafés, pubs, clubs, mosques, workplaces and on the Internet.”²⁹ The praxis of ecclesia at the margins takes into consideration the exegesis of cultural context. The issue of cultural contextualization has become a driving concern, so at the forefront of this discussion is the church in culture.

Church in Culture

Church in culture is not a new concern or conversation surrounding cultural contexts and the contextualization of the Gospel. There is a general fear and concern by the church

²⁶ Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 254–255.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 253.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 254.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

that by engaging marginalized people in contextualization via culturally relevant activities, the church will succumb to syncretism. Culture in itself is a constant factor in human society, as well as, in ecclesia. Defining culture in broad general terms William Kornblum writes,

We can define culture as all the modes of thought, behavior, and production that are handed down from one generation to the next by means of communicative interaction – language, gestures, writing, building, and all other communication among humans – rather than by genetic transmission, or heredity. This definition encompasses a vast array of behaviors, technologies, religions, and so on – in other words, just about everything thought or made by humans. . . . A society’s *culture* consists of all the ways in which its members think about their society and communicate about it among themselves.³⁰

According to Kornblum ecclesia is one aspect of a society’s culture. In his writings, Newbigin confirms this definition in a shorter version, he writes, “By the word culture we have to understand the sum total of ways of living developed by a group of human beings and handed on from generation to generation.”³¹ Newbigin asserts the importance of the church in culture by placing both the church and the gospel directly within the culture of a society. He asserts, “There is no culturally neutral position. North American culture has its unique embodiment of the gospel.”³² Newbigin more fully explains his statement about the lack of neutrality within culture, especially where ecclesia and the gospel are concerned, he asserts,

Every statement of the gospel in words is conditioned by the culture of which those words are a part, and every style of life that claims to embody the truth of the gospel is a culturally conditioned style of life. There can never be a culture-free gospel. Yet the gospel, which is from the beginning to the end embodied in culturally conditioned forms, calls into question all cultures, including the one in which it was originally embodied.³³

³⁰ William Kornblum, *Sociology in a Changing World* (Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2003), 56.

³¹ Newbigin, *Foolishness to The Greeks*, 3.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 4.

Newbigin's diagnostic suggests that the difficulty the church is experiencing within culture is due to the embedded cultural orientation. Newbigin gives a further assessment in the diagnostic of the ecclesial struggle for identity. He writes, "The Christendom curse/context is the main context for Christian dialogue – this makes it extremely difficult to break out of the limitation imposed by Christendom upon conversation with non-western civilizations."³⁴

This perspective represents Newbigin relating his personal missionary encounter within non-western cultures, but the transition in North America to a postmodern and post-Christendom culture correlates with his conclusion. The conclusion is the church in western societies is embedded completely within culture. The church in culture has lost its place as the central creative force. Louis Dupré, Professor of the Philosophy of Religion at Yale University, in an interview asserts,

. . . the West appears to have said its definitive farewell to a Christian culture. Little of the old hostility remains. Our secular colleagues are happy to recognize the debt our civilization owes to the Christian faith to the extent that the faith, having been absorbed by culture itself, has become simply another cultural artifact. Christianity has become an historical factor subservient to a secular culture rather than functioning as the creative power it once was.³⁵

If Dupré's conclusion is correct then it is no wonder the church in culture has lost its position of influence. Western culture in North America particularly has as one of its basic premises individual freedom. It is the radical individualism in the United States of America that has produced the cultural transition that has moved the church out of the center of culture.³⁶ The societal structure of Western civilization allows for individual freedom. Newbigin asserts, "Western civilization has created an individual centered culture rather than a community

³⁴ Ibid., 7.

³⁵ Louis Dupré, "Seeking Christian Interiority: An Interview with Louis Dupré", n.d., <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=214>, (accessed September 8, 2011).

³⁶ For further reading on the issue of radical individualism see David Myers, *The American Paradox: Spiritual Hunger in an Age of Plenty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 161-194.

centered culture. ‘The autonomous human being is still the center – with total freedom of choice.’³⁷ Individual autonomy in itself takes away any compelling reason to embrace any particular truth claim and opens opportunities for all truth claims to be treated on an equal basis. Dupré states,

Culture itself has become the real religion of our time, and it has absorbed all other religion as a subordinate part of itself. It even offers some of the emotional benefits of religion, without exacting the high price of faith demands. We have all become atheists, not in the hostile, antireligious sense of an earlier era, but in the sense that God no longer matters *absolutely* in our closed world, if God matters at all.³⁸

Dupré in this interview goes on to describe the lack of church in culture in the West due to the overarching triumph of over two hundred years of cultural transition. The subordination of Christianity was inevitable.

This subordination of Christianity in culture is exactly why the metro area of Portland, Oregon is the focus of this paper: due to the cultural characteristics of the inhabitants of this area. Portland provides a unique opportunity to examine the future of the church in a postmodern and post-Christendom culture and the development of alternative missional ecclesia amid the marginalized people. The challenge of contextualization of the Gospel amid the marginalized with a meaningful theological praxis should be of great concern for the future of the church in North America. The lessons learned through the practitioners who have successfully created and sustain ecclesia amid Portland’s marginalized people may hold significant influence upon contextualization practices and strategies.

³⁷ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 15.

³⁸ Dupré.

Portland Context

“Keep Portland Weird;”³⁹ These bumper stickers on vehicles throughout the Portland Metro area resound the native declaration about the culture within this regional area. The moniker, Keep Portland Weird, was intended to help support local businesses, but has become a major cultural theme. Weird, as unique, is a fitting description of the Portland Metro area. The culture of Portland is pluralistic, diverse and unique: “Weird.” Portland demonstrates that it is culturally a postmodern and post-Christendom metro region through its resistance to Christianity that is pervasive in the general culture. Portland, Oregon is the third least churched city in the United States of America with 42 percent of the population “of whom had not been to a religious worship service in the last six months,” as well as, the second in the lowest share of self-identified Christians at 71 percent.⁴⁰ Deviance from mainstream cultural norms is not necessarily viewed as negative in the diverse segments of Portland, Oregon.

Portland is known for being a haven for a large number of sub-cultural groups such as the punk movement, hardcore, crust punk, anarchist and subgenres movements.⁴¹ It is also known for the prolific sex trade industry with more strip clubs per capita than Las Vegas,

³⁹ The website for Keep Portland Weird reads, “Keep Portland Weird is about supporting local business in the Portland Oregon area. We want to support local business because they make Portland stand out from other cities and make it a more unique place to live. They do this by providing consumers a wide range of products that represent the different cultures that make up Portland. Local businesses also have pride in our city and are driven to make Portland a better place to live and enjoy. What does the word weird mean? Webster states ‘of strange or extraordinary character.’ Weird in this case means unique. “Keep Portland Weird!”, n.d., <http://www.keepportlandweird.com/>, (accessed October 8, 2011).

⁴⁰ “The Barna Group - New Barna Report Examines Diversity of Faith in Various U.S. Cities”, n.d., <http://www.barna.org/faith-spirituality/435-diversity-of-faith-in-various-us-cities>, (accessed October 9, 2011).

⁴¹ “Portland Culture | Portland Living”, n.d., <http://portlandliving.org/about-portland/portland-culture/>, (accessed October 8, 2011).

“the largest legal sex industry per capita in the nation.”⁴² Portland culture has a significant Gay, Lesbian, Transvestite and Transgender population with a strong activist mentality.⁴³ Portland offers significant opportunities for the gospel, but the atmosphere of the general population is not open to the traditional or institutional church with the prevailing postmodernist and post-Christendom shift.

Dealing with this sociological construct of a culture that is closed to Christianity has created significant issues for the contemporary institutional church that is seeking to engage the milieu. The use of mass evangelism within Portland only seems to exasperate the forward movement of the gospel. The plurality, diversity and high level sub-cultural marginalization does not create an atmosphere that is receptive to the Attractional, Propositional and Colonial Church. In the milieu of the marginalized in the Portland Metro area there are some expressions of ecclesia that have been successfully created and sustained. Forms of alternative missional ecclesia amid the punk culture, homeless, anarchists, the unwanted tribe, and the sex workers, as well as, amid the burnt over areas that were considered high target areas for church planting.

This paper is about these exceptional forms of alternative missional ecclesia that have found expression amid the marginalized people, thereby establishing that the institutional church is not relevant amid marginalized people. The question is simply, “how”? How were these ecclesial expressions created? What sustains them? Are there certain practices and strategies? Is it just innovation and experimentation that has allowed them to continue? Is there biblical and historical precedence for the praxis of these ecclesial groups? What

⁴² “Portland Emerges as a Hub for Child Sex Trafficking - ABC News”, n.d., <http://abcnews.go.com/US/portland-emerges-hub-child-sex-trafficking/story?id=11690544>, (accessed October 9, 2011).

⁴³ “Portland Culture | Portland Living.”

theological praxis is at work amid these churches? Is there a common thread, praxis, behavior, or story that unites each ecclesia? What is evident is they offer unusual solutions to paradoxical problems for the institutional church.

Each one of the forms of ecclesia that are part of this study has one initial common characteristic; they unknowingly have engaged the Positive Deviance Approach in relationship amid their marginalized communities. The leaders or practitioners in the ecclesia practice and behave in manners and ways that go beyond innovation and experimentation. They demonstrate an intuitive sense for cultural context that brought about an effective contextualization of the Gospel amid the marginalized through their theological praxis. Contextualization involves a focused concern in order to create an environment of trust amid the marginalized.

Contextualization

Contextualization amid mainstream society is widely demonstrated through the use of popular music forms and church structure that reflects a CEO led business. Examining the New Testament it appears to demonstrate that contextualization is a normative practice within Christianity.⁴⁴ Dean Flemming, noted New Testament Professor, asserts, “Contextualizing the gospel is inherent to the mission of the church.”⁴⁵ When considering the concept of contextualization amid the marginalized people of Portland, Oregon the New

⁴⁴ For further reading concerning contextualizations relationship with Christianity and culture refer to Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions*; Dean E. Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (InterVarsity Press, 2005); David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (William Carey Library, 2003); Hiebert and Meneses, *Incarnational ministry*; Hunter, *The Celtic way of evangelism*; Paul G. Hiebert, Robert Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response To Popular Beliefs And Practices* (Baker Books, 2000).

⁴⁵ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 25.

Testament presents a trajectory of contextualization.

The trajectory of contextualization in the New Testament begins in the Gospels with Jesus Christ by presenting a descriptive Christology. George W. Peters, Professor of World Missions, writes about the issue of contextualization amid the Gentiles. He asserts,

It must be realized that there is no real gospel message – good news – for the Gentiles before the cross and resurrection of Christ. In his cardinal and redemptive facts of incarnation – sin-bearing, death and resurrection – Christ identified himself with mankind. In his life, culture, and earthly ministry he identified himself with Israel as predicted in the Old Testament.⁴⁶

Flemming makes a statement that supports Peters’ assertion that contextualization of the Gospel began with Jesus Christ’s identification with humanity through the incarnation,

The incarnation of Jesus serves as a key paradigm for a contextualized mission and theology. The New Testament declares that the eternal word of God was enfleshed in Jesus of Nazareth (Jn 1:14). Through his incarnation, Jesus explained or “exegeted” (exēgesato) the Father to us . . . he embraced the human context in all of its “scandalous particularity.”⁴⁷

Flemming goes on to elaborate about contextualization in the New Testament, but moves the trajectory from the Gospels to include the book of Acts, he asserts, “The book of Acts tells the story of a church whose very identity involved expressing the good news about Jesus in multiple settings and among new groups of people.”⁴⁸ Contextualization is demonstrated through the incarnation of Jesus Christ in the narrative Gospels and continued to be demonstrated in the narrative of the church. The need for contextualization of the Gospel exists in contemporary societies as it did during the first century. Marginalized people are culturally distinctive beyond the reach of the institutional church’s ability to influence them. In order to reach marginalized people in contemporary society, contextualization of the

⁴⁶ Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions*, 52.

⁴⁷ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 20.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

Gospel offers the opportunity to create and sustain dynamic relationships, but it is not enough in and of itself. Theological praxis is the driving force of contextualization.

Theological Praxis

Theological praxis extends theology beyond the theoretical and places it in actual practice amid the context of the mission of Christ and the Christian community.⁴⁹ It is practical in nature and not only propositional, in other words the difference between a theology that is based in theory and theology grounded in real life practices. Summarizing the words of Ray S. Anderson, Senior Professor of Theology and Ministry at Fuller Theological Seminary, the church is in need of theology that not only “talks” but also “walks.”⁵⁰ In this paper we will show Jesus’ theological praxis was done amid the community and the early church followed his modeling. The incarnation placed Jesus directly amid the marginalized, Flemming notes Jesus’ context, and “Jesus became one with the weak and the marginalized of his society.”⁵¹ His example provides the basis, the very foundation, for the practices and strategies the church exercised amid the marginalized people. Flemming elaborates on Jesus’ theology in praxis, “When Jesus did theology he consistently used local resources. Jesus’ preaching of the Kingdom of God, his teaching on the law and righteousness, and his use of life specific parables drew upon language, thought categories and rhetorical traditions from the Jewish culture of his day.”⁵² Jesus’ model of theology was not just propositional, but was lived out in community, lived out in culture.

⁴⁹ Ray Sherman Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology* (InterVarsity Press, 2001), 23.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵¹ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 20.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 21.

Anderson quotes Thomas Torrance about Christ driving the theological praxis of the church,

The Church cannot be in Christ without being in Him as He has proclaimed to men in their need and with being in Him as He encounters us in and behind the existence of every man in his need. Nor can the Church be recognized as His except in that meeting of Christ with Himself in the depth of human misery, where Christ clothed with His gospel meets Christ clothed with the desperate need and plight of men.⁵³

Torrance defines theological praxis as originating in and through Jesus Christ. This is theological praxis where Christ is in all and through all. Jesus is the source of the theological praxis of the church amid marginalized people.

Jesus' theological praxis placed him amid the marginalized people of society and demonstrated an alternative approach to the normative theological praxis of his Judaic culture. He demonstrated this through engaging lepers, women, and outcasts. He demonstrated his praxis by challenging the traditions and conventional wisdom of his time through the use of what may best be described as the Positive Deviance Approach.

The Positive Deviance Approach

Theological praxis needs an empowering methodology that creates the connection between theory and practice. In the coming sections we will show that the solution for creating a bridge between theory and practice in theological praxis is found in the Positive Deviance Approach. As mentioned in the thesis of this paper the alternate missional ecclesia, through their use of the Positive Deviance Approach, with their unique strategies and practices provide support for empowering contextualization with theological praxis to create and sustain ecclesial communities amid marginalized people. The Positive Deviance Approach is practiced long before it is known and understood by those who are its

⁵³ Thomas Torrance, "Service in Jesus Christ," Ray S. Anderson, *Theological Foundations For Ministry: Selected Readings for a Theology of the Church in Ministry* (Continuum International Publishing Group, 1999), 724.

practitioners.⁵⁴

The Positive Deviance Approach requires a reorientation toward leadership and where real cultural transformation transpires. Richard Pascale, an Associate Fellow of Said Business School at Oxford University, elaborates on the Positive Deviance Approach, it is “invisible in plain sight . . . invisible positive deviants often ‘don’t know what they know’ (i.e., don’t realize they are doing anything unusual or noteworthy.”⁵⁵ He goes onto explain that “the Positive Deviance process is a tool for adaptive work.”⁵⁶ His intent by this statement is to indicate that it is the “how” that takes priority over what. The movement is away from producing change or transformation from a propositional ideology to an organic practice of community. He views the approach as “disseminating through the practice of new behavior – not through explanation or edict.” The approach turns the hierarchical system upside down and empowers those who occupied the bottom to bring about change rather than dependence upon the leadership or experts. A couple examples of the application of the Positive Deviance Approach are the application of the process to combat childhood malnutrition in Vietnam through Save the Children, as well as to combat female genital mutilation in Egypt.⁵⁷ The Positive Deviance Approach may be summarized as follows:

- Culture must be engaged from within culture. Transformation of a culture comes from within and not from above or outside the culture as in the exercise of cultural colonialism or imperialism.
- Cultures and communities self-navigate and create their own identity through their resources and social assets to solve a problem.

⁵⁴ Richard Pascale et al., *The Power of Positive Deviance: How Unlikely Innovators Solve the World’s Toughest Problems* (Harvard Business Press, 2010), 7.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 8.

⁵⁷ http://www.positivedeviance.org/from_the_field/index.html

- A community exercises collective intelligence by designing their own practices and is not focused within the leadership of a community alone, nor is it sourced from external experts but is scattered amid the community.
- The community adapts to the internal diversity and transformation, thereby creating distinctive practices and strategies.
- Sustainability is essential to the approach. The community seeks and creates the solutions to their problems in order to sustain change and the existence of a healthy community.
- It is easier to change behavior by practicing it rather than knowing about it. “It is easier to act your way into a new way of thinking than think your way into a new way of acting.”⁵⁸

The Positive Deviance Approach is an anthropologically based approach that works amid a culture not to change the culture from outside, but from within. Engaging marginalized people amid the greater culture of Portland, Oregon requires an intuitive based theological praxis to empower contextualization of the Gospel. As an approach it requires the practitioners to enter into a culture as a native, or at least as a welcomed guest to learn and understand a culture. This practice and strategy is counterintuitive to modernist missionary methods that follow a colonialist methodology. But this was not always the methodology of church. In the next chapter we will show that Jesus’ practices and strategies mirrored a form of the Positive Deviance Approach amid his Judaic Culture. Since Jesus is viewed as the prototype of all Christian behavior, practices and strategies great attention should be given to his intuitive methods and engagement of his culture as a model for engaging marginalized people in contemporary society.

⁵⁸ Pascale et al., *The Power of Positive Deviance*, 190–194.

CHAPTER TWO:

BIBLICAL MATERIALS

*Christ's whole life in all its aspects must
supply the norm for the life of the following Christian
and thus for the life of the whole Church.*

--Søren Kierkegaard

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to focus on the practices and strategies of Jesus Christ within his cultural milieu, as presented in the narrative of the Gospels, in order to determine if he should be considered a practitioner of the Positive Deviance Approach. In every sense Jesus Christ, through his practices and strategies, is the prototype and foundation of the early church. Jesus experienced conflict with the prevailing religious culture as recorded by the writers of the Gospels. Within these conflicts Jesus is presented by the writers in a manner that indicates he deviated or practiced a strategy of positive deviance in response to held traditions that marginalized people. The response of those who were in power appears, according to the writers, as they were attempting to marginalize Jesus himself and minimize his influence and social power. Jesus challenges the prevailing culture through his practices and strategies of positive deviance. Through the narrative of the Gospels Jesus may best be understood as practicing the positive deviance approach long before it is defined and known. Jesus' actions model the practices and strategies the early church adopted and are the model for the contemporary church if we are willing to follow Christ.

The experiences of early Christians were steeped in the narrative of Jesus Christ's life. The writers of the Gospels intentionally depict Jesus as a deviant in the eyes of those who were in power, namely the Sadducees and the Pharisees. Jesus' strategies and practices appear to break with the status quo of traditions held within the Judaic culture. The behavior

of breaking with the status quo presents specific applications and opportunities in contemporary Western culture as the church faces the issues of post-Christendom and postmodernism. Similarly, the behavior of deviance towards the status quo should affect the practices and strategies of the church in relationship to the marginalized peoples of society. The narrative of the Gospels is the foundation of engaging in a life of following Jesus Christ and learning to challenge the status quo of the church and society.

Narrative

The Gospel, which comes to us in four narratives, sets the context of the life of Jesus Christ, illustrating his practices and strategies as we understand it nearly two-thousand years later. The purpose of this section is to briefly examine the Gospels as contextualized narratives in order to establish whether or not contextualization¹ is a normative practice and strategy of the early church. The narrative form of the Gospels is designed to engage the audience and draw them into the midst of the story in order to create an understanding of the life of Jesus and his ministry. The narrative of the Gospels presents Jesus interacting with his culture, as well as its expectation of normative behavior and ensuing conflicts. The Apostle

¹ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 234; Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*; Richard Bauckham, *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 22; “Contextualization is not a passing fad or a debatable option. It is essential to our understanding of God’s self-revelation. The incarnation is the ultimate paradigm of the translation of text into context. Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate as a Jew, identified with a particular culture at a limited moment in history though transcending it. In his life and teaching he is the supreme model of contextualization. His every command was *de facto* a command to contextualization, whether to love one’s neighbour or to disciple the nations. The implication of this process is seen in the apostolic witness and the life of the New Testament church. The difference in theological emphasis and preaching method between Paul’s address to the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:16–41) and his address to the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:22–31) is but one notable illustration of the sociological and theological inevitability of contextualization. In the history of dogma the affirmations of the truths of God’s revelation in Scripture have always involved a selection of themes and contextualized language in response to the particular theological and ethical issues confronting the church in that moment of history. The creeds, confessions and statements of faith reflect this process.” Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and James Innell Packer, *New Dictionary of Theology* (InterVarsity Press, 2000), 164.

John makes his purpose statement clear in John 20:31, “But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.” The Gospels as narrative are represented in three synoptic and one distinct account to narrate the life of Christ. New Testament theologian Dean Flemming asserts, “The Gospels tell the defining story of Jesus, sent by God, crucified, risen. Everything else in the New Testament in some way assumes and interprets this master narrative.”² The narrative formulation is not accidental, but designed in order to contextualize the Gospel for its various audiences. Flemming asserts, “. . . the four Evangelists have narrated the story of Jesus according to their own theological and literary concerns and in light of how they perceived the needs of their readers.”³ The Gospels are the result of intentional contextualization; thereby communicating the life of Jesus Christ in various cultural settings in the first century.

The writers of the Gospels understood the audience as diverse and pluralistic. The Gospel events, for the most part take place in Judaic culture, but the contents of the Gospel were not ever meant to be constrained by that culture. Flemming, and others of the New Testament school set on contextualizing the larger narrative, would argue that the four Gospel accounts are indeed separate contextualizations of a single story. Contextualization creates narrative relevance connecting the Christological message of the Gospels with other cultures. Flemming asserts,

If we are correct that the Gospels were targeted to different groups of people within the Greco-Roman world, then the relationship between the Evangelist and his audience becomes a key to understanding how the Gospel writers contextualized their Christological story.⁴

² Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 234.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 238–239.

The necessity of the narrative form is to connect with the literacy level of the intended audience. Each of the Gospels appears to use varying levels of literary competence in order to achieve contextualization, thereby, allowing the target audience to connect with the Gospels in their perspective. Flemming writes, “The Gospels also vary in the levels of literary and rhetorical competency they expect from their audiences. Thus, Luke shows a higher degree of literary sophistication and mastery of Greek style (e.g., Luke 1:1-4) than Mark.”⁵ The literacy rate in the first century was quite low; however, due to regional populations and cultures, as well as the consideration of citizen’s class and gender, it is difficult to estimate with any accuracy the true literacy rate of the First Century world. Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans, distinguished New Testament scholars, discuss this issue further in the *Dictionary of New Testament Background: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, wherein they assert:

W. V. Harris, using a broad definition of literacy and drawing on evidence partly explicit, partly circumstantial and partly comparative, has concluded that over the whole period of classical antiquity the extent of literacy rarely exceeded 10 percent of the population. In the special circumstances of a few Hellenistic cities it may have approximated 20 to 30 percent, while in the western provinces of the Roman Empire it may not have been as high as 5 to 10 percent. Such quantifications are necessarily tentative, but this estimate now commands broad assent. Even if the rate were twice as high, literacy would have characterized only a small minority, and it is beyond dispute that the ancient world knew nothing remotely like mass literacy.⁶

W. V. Harris’ estimation as a noted Professor of History at Columbia University specializing in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds is sufficient in establishing the literacy rate for the purpose of this study, as the educational environment greatly empowered the literate of the

⁵ Ibid., 239.

⁶ Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans, *Dictionary of New Testament Background: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Literacy and Book Culture.

first century. The lack of literacy amid the general population creates the necessity for an oral tradition. The narrative form allows for a dynamic oral delivery within a plurality of cultural contexts. The fact that the Gospel writers took into consideration the cultural contexts of the audience is evidence of the basic characteristics of positive deviance. Jerry and Monique Sternin, former directors of the Positive Deviance Initiative at Tufts University in Boston, in reference to positive deviance characteristics in cultural contexts believes, “. . . it is embedded in the social context of the community.”⁷ The Gospel as narrative appears to firmly place the positive deviance characteristics and process within the social context of the community, as the Gospels were initially communicated through oral narratives in order to connect directly with the literacy levels of the audience. Flemming asserts this perspective,

Gospel writers like Mark primarily intended their works to be orally recited or performed in a communal setting – most likely a house church – then the Gospel’s ability to target and shape an audience becomes even more compelling. In the culture of the day, oral delivery would have been quite dramatic and spirited, emphasizing the emotional impact of the Gospel on the hearers. This enables the Gospel to become not just a story but an event which directly involves the listeners.⁸

Narrative contextualization of the Gospels allows for cultural relevance in an orally literate culture. Gospel literacy in the first century was mainly based in oral tradition. Each narrative presents specific cultural nuances. According to Flemming the Gospel of Mark relates primarily to “*Gentiles* of the Greco-roman biography.”⁹ The priority of the Gospel of Mark is generally accepted amid New Testament scholars as the primary source for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.¹⁰ The Gospel of Matthew is contextualized primarily for Jews.¹¹ The

⁷ Pascale et al., *The Power of Positive Deviance*, 197.

⁸ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 239.

⁹ Flemming is the source of italics in this quote, *Ibid.*, 241.

¹⁰ Christopher Tuckett, “The Current State of the Synoptic Problem”, 2008, <http://www.webcitation.org/5YBgZFADe>. (Date Accessed October 20, 2011).

indication is Matthew was steeped in the Judaic Christianity contained within Jerusalem. Luke is presented in a way which lends itself to a Gentile orientation, because it follows the story telling form or narrative form that is historically presented in Greco-Roman style. Flemming asserts, “Luke shows the strongest influence from Greco-Roman literary forms and conventions, with features of both Hellenistic biographies and historical writings of the time.”¹² Flemming’s assertion is that Luke is a clear contextualization for the Greco-Roman culture or the Hellenized world. The Gospel according to Luke would have an Empire contextualization allowing it to be broadly accessible to the diverse cultures desiring to emulate or acculturate in the Hellenization process. The Gospel according to John presents a unique issue in contextualization.

In an examination of the Johannine account there is diversity in scholarship centered on the exact community of people to whom this Gospel was addressed. Most modern scholars assert the Gospel according to John is the product of a Johannine community. D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo explain, “The fact remains that despite support for Johannine authorship by a few front rank scholars in this century and by many popular writers, a large majority of contemporary scholars reject this view.”¹³ Flemming believes that no clearly defined community existed, whereas he asserts that the Gospel According to John possesses the most radical contextualization of all the Gospels. The distinctive Gospel of John presents issues for scholars due in part to the complexities and theories behind its development. Flemming’s asserts, “. . . if we listen to John’s own statement of purpose for his Gospel, we get the clear impression that he had a readership in view that extends beyond a narrowly

¹¹Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 244.

¹² Ibid., 250.

¹³ D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Zondervan, 2005), 233.

defined community of Christians.”¹⁴ The Gospel as narrative and orally transmitted writings implies that the Gospels were intended for use in pluralistic cultural environments and was not intended to be contained within one cultural context.

The Gospel as narrative is evidence of contextualization for the purpose of reaching diverse and plural cultures. Paul G. Hiebert, Robert Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénou write about this relationship within the Gospels, “Contextualization must be an ongoing process in the life of the church. On the one hand, the world is constantly changing, raising new questions that must be addressed. On the other hand, all human understandings and obedience to the gospel are partial.”¹⁵ The initial biblical material, the Gospels, coming to diverse cultures in the form of narratives presents a relevant genre that reflects the foundation of Gospel communication. The writers of the gospels recognized the importance of speaking from within a culture to the peoples of that culture. The action of speaking from within a culture is one of the main characteristics of the Positive Deviance Approach.¹⁶ Regardless of the writers’ understanding of this founding characteristic of the early church (cultural contextualization) it is this cultural nuance that presents everything known about Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is presented to the world in the form of contextualized narrative. This formulation gives the church a descriptive narrative of the incarnation of Jesus Christ as the key paradigm connecting God with humanity in the person Jesus.

The evidence of cultural contextualization supports the concept and process of the Positive Deviance Approach. By presenting the Gospel in the context of culture, each writer has nuanced the narrative to relate to various cultures. Fredrick J. Murphy writes, “. . . the

¹⁴ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 258.

¹⁵ Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 387.

¹⁶ Pascale et al., *The Power of Positive Deviance*, 7.

gospel writers had their own viewpoints affecting the way they told the story of Jesus.”¹⁷

Each of the Gospel writers presents their Christological perspective through the narrative in order to connect with the people in the diverse cultures throughout the Empire.

The three contextualized Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, as well as the radical contextualized Gospel of John each contain a descriptive narrative concerning Jesus Christ with particular Christological perspectives. It is through these Gospels that church is able to connect with the unique practices and strategies of Jesus Christ as a contextualization through incarnation. Contextualization as a practice and strategy of the early church may be seen as normative. The next portion of the study will examine the practices and strategies of Jesus Christ in the Gospels. The question is: are Jesus’ practices and strategies perceived as deviance in the Judaic culture? It is important to understand how Jesus is perceived because in every sense Jesus Christ is the prototype and the foundation of the early church.

Jesus and Deviance

Jesus’ practices and strategies, as well as his message, are given in context-specific narratives. Through these context-specific narratives, a description of Jesus as a religious and cultural deviant is developed by the writers of the Gospels in relationship to those who were in power, the Pharisees, Scribes, Temple Priests, and Sadducees. Many people would not appreciate the messiah, Jesus Christ, being referred to as a deviant.¹⁸ But the issue is not the perspective of Jesus Christ in Western civilization, but the depiction of Jesus in view of the

¹⁷ Frederick James Murphy, *Early Judaism: The Exile to the Time of Jesus* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 227.

¹⁸ Deviance refers to “*behaviors or characteristics that violate important group norms and as a consequence are reacted to with social disapproval.*” Italics belong to the author, Thomas Sullivan, *Sociology--Concepts, Issues, and Applications*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1990), 143.

New Testament narrative. Is Jesus considered a deviant by the Judaic culture? The challenge to the view of Jesus as a deviant may come across as incongruent with the prevailing perspective of Western cultures.¹⁹ It is specifically these incongruous practices and strategies of Jesus Christ this study seeks to bring to the forefront of the conversation involving the churches' relationship with marginalized people and groups. In the next section of this study the Gospel of Luke will serve as the baseline account with some references to the other Gospels in order to gain a clear picture of Jesus' practices and strategies.

Jesus' Practices and Strategies

The Gospel according to Luke narrates an initial focus upon the marginalized through Jesus' announcement in the synagogue of Nazareth. Jesus defines in Luke 4:16-30 those who will be the beneficiaries of the Gospel, “. . . *to the poor . . . release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind and to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*”²⁰ Jesus' message focuses on those who are socially marginalized and outcast. He presents a message of hope and redemption for those who experience social inequality and injustice. The narrative moves from initial acceptance to an almost murderous rejection of Jesus.²¹ Those who seem to have known Jesus most of his life reject him. Why? The answer is present in the pericope of Luke 4:16-30. Jesus makes a radical inclusion of non-Jews in the eschatological visitation of God.²² The radical inclusion of the Gentiles or non-Jews in the eschatological visitation of God challenges the national and ethnic exclusivity of

¹⁹ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *ReJesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church* (Peabody Mass. ;Sydney: Hendrickson Publishers ;;Strand Publishing, 2009), 4.

²⁰ Italics are mine, Luke 4:16-30.

²¹ Lk 4:28-30.

²² Lk 4:18-19, 25-27.

Judaic culture. Jesus' inclusive practices and strategies deviate from the long held traditions of the Jewish people and place him in opposition to the conventional wisdom and norms of Judaism.

Jesus employs the account of the interaction between the signs prophets, Elijah and Elisha, and the Gentiles in Sidon and Syria. His illustration demonstrates the inclusion of Gentiles in God's salvation. Jesus' proclamation is what drove the reaction of the crowd. Jesus succeeded in enjoining his ministry with that of the prophets Elijah and Elisha presenting a semiotic view of his developing relationship with the Judaic leadership and the Gentiles. A tension was created through Jesus' use of the dynamic comparison between contemporary Israel of his time with the Israel of Elijah and Elisha's time. The visitation of God is extended beyond the Jews to all nations, ". . . outside the boundaries of the people of Israel."²³ Craig S. Keener gives clarification about Jesus' announcement,

Jesus mentions the socially weak (widows) and marginalized (lepers) here, but the main point is that non-Jews were the ones to accept two of the major signs prophets of the Old Testament. Sidon and Syria were among the particularly despised areas. Jesus' point: Nazareth will not receive him, but non-Jews will.²⁴

The message, though it is found in the Old Testament,²⁵ appears to go against the prevailing sentiment of the Jewish community. Jesus' strategy of inclusion of the Gentiles deviates from the status quo of the Judaic community that believes only those who are of Jewish descent will benefit from the eschatological visitation of God. The inclusion of the Gentiles places Jesus in direct conflict with the Jewish religious sentiment and their understanding of the

²³ Luke Timothy Johnson and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Luke* (Liturgical Press, 1991), 82–83.

²⁴ Craig S. Keener and InterVarsity Press, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Lk 4:25.

²⁵ "Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy," Proverbs 31:8-9.

eschatological visitation of God and is just one example of Jesus' deviance. Jesus' message of inclusion of Gentiles moves away from Judaic expectations within the culture and religious milieu of his time. It is important to understand that Jesus' message deviates with what appears to be the prevailing Torah teaching²⁶ of the general Judaic population. The community experienced an upset in the group equilibrium established by long held traditions and beliefs. Essentially, Jesus perturbs the community's orthodoxies causing the community to mobilize against the apparent threat to their identity. The reaction of those gathered in the synagogue to hear Jesus demonstrates the position of Jewish distinctiveness while Jesus, through deviance, takes a position in direct opposition to be inclusive of Gentiles. The strategy of inclusion is incongruous with first century Judaism. In summary this deviant position taken by Christ to the culture and the reaction of the crowd confirms Jesus deviated from Judaic cultural norms.

Jesus' use of Table Fellowship

Jesus further demonstrates his deviance to the prevailing status quo and the conventional norms of the Judaic culture through the company he kept in several instances. His deviance is present in the narratives of the Gospels through the questioning of the Pharisees about his practice of table fellowship. Jesus' table fellowship is explicitly narrated in the Gospel of Luke²⁷ and implicitly narrated in the Gospels of Mark²⁸ and Matthew.²⁹ The explicit narration in the Gospel of Luke will be addressed in this study.

²⁶ Murphy, *Early Judaism*, 409–410.

²⁷ Johnson and Harrington, *The Gospel of Luke*.

²⁸ John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark* (Liturgical Press, 2002).

²⁹ Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Liturgical Press, 1991).

Luke 5:27-32 frames the narration of the calling of a tax collector named Levi. As a tax collector Levi is viewed as a person excluded from normal religious activities.³⁰ Levi would have been viewed with suspicion due to his occupation and his association with the Romans or Herod. Jesus' deviance is initially illustrated in the calling of Levi to discipleship. The image of calling a tax collector into discipleship creates a paradoxical issue for the Pharisees. What is the nature of the kingdom Jesus is proclaiming where "sinners" and "tax collectors" are invited to partake? It appears by means of the text that no self-respecting rabbi would agree with such a practice, calling an unscrupulous tax collector as a disciple, and then to engaging in table fellowship with Levi and his friends.³¹ Keener writes, "The Pharisee (and the teachers belonging to their party) were scrupulous about their special rules on eating and did not like to eat with less scrupulous people, especially people like tax gatherer and sinners."³² Jesus' practice and strategy of calling the unscrupulous is deviant in nature as witness by the Pharisees reaction to Levi's inclusion.

The reaction of the Pharisees to Jesus' deviance is due to axiomatic rules surrounding the traditions of table fellowship in the ancient world. Luke Timothy Johnson notes ". . . that table fellowship, like hospitality, symbolizes spiritual unity (cf. 2 John 11)."³³ Jesus' action creates a paradoxical situation that is irreconcilable in the Judaic theology of the kingdom. Table fellowship was perceived in view of the kingdom and those who would possess it. Craig Blomberg notes that ". . . the Talmud declares that the pure-minded in Jerusalem would

³⁰ Johnson and Harrington, *The Gospel of Luke*, 99.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Craig S. Keener and InterVarsity Press, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (InterVarsity Press, 1993), Luke 5:30.

³³ Johnson and Harrington, *The Gospel of Luke*, Luke 5:27–39.

not sit for a meal unless they knew who their table companions would be.”³⁴ The issue of Jewish piety, purity and kingdom are directly challenged by Jesus’ strategy and practice.

Therefore, Jesus’ action is viewed as deviant by the prevailing religious and cultural leaders.

Blomberg, concerning this deviant practice of Jesus, concludes,

In banqueting with Levi, Jesus has shown himself unwilling to follow his culture’s traditions about associating with the ritually impure and the morally wicked. But Jesus does not simply transgress boundaries; he clearly calls Levi and his associates to follow him in discipleship.³⁵

The practice and strategy of the inclusion of those who are marginalized is central to the message of the Gospel of Luke. Jesus is not only preaching, but is demonstrating his radical inclusiveness of the Gospel in and through table fellowship. This inclusive message, of those who did not practice the normative Judaic traditions, was not popular amid the prevailing religious elite. The view from within the Judaic religious culture perceives Jesus as a deviant. The 21st century perspective is that Jesus is making a divine correction, but the concern of this paper is the perspective from within the culture of 1st century Judaism. Through the story of Levi’s calling to discipleship and enjoining in table fellowship with Jesus, Jesus is presented by the writer of the Gospel of Luke as a religious and cultural deviant.

In another event recorded in the Gospel of Mark 14:1-9, the host of the dinner party given in the honor of Jesus’ is referred to as Simon the leper. The Gospels of Mark and Matthew both give this designation of leper to the host.³⁶ This designation is troubling, especially for those who follow the purity laws, because requirements for lepers were strictly observed,

³⁴ Craig Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus’ Meals With Sinners* (Leicester England; Downers Grove Ill.: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2005), 95.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 126.

³⁶ Matthew 26:6-13.

In Christ's day no leper could live in a walled town, though he might in an open village. But wherever he was he was required to have his outer garment rent as a sign of deep grief, to go bareheaded, and to cover his beard with his mantle, as if in lamentation at his own virtual death. He had further to warn passers-by to keep away from him, by calling out, 'Unclean! Unclean!', nor could he speak to any one, or receive or return a salutation, since in the East this involves an embrace.³⁷

The constraints placed upon lepers would have prevented participation in a social gathering with those not afflicted with the disease thereby maintaining the division between the pure and impure people.³⁸ There are questions that surround Simon and his designation as "the leper." Some scholars speculate that the host, Simon the leper, was a person whom Jesus may have previously healed of leprosy. There is no evidence presented in the pericope or the Gospels to confirm that Simon was healed. John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, New Testament scholars, assert, "In the pre-Markan tradition it was most likely assumed that this 'Simon' had been healed of his leprosy."³⁹ They conclude that Simon was possibly a leper recorded in an earlier encounter, "Mark may have added this designation to recall the earlier meeting of Jesus and the leper in Galilee."⁴⁰ Keener writes concerning Simon the leper, "If Simon had been a 'leper,' he was certainly not one by this point; no one would have joined him for dinner if he had been. Jesus may have healed him."⁴¹ The title elicits a cultural stigma and marginalization of the person of Simon.

The title itself evokes a certain perspective concerning Jesus' host and reflects directly upon the dining habits of Jesus as presented by the Gospel writers. This pericope, along with its parallel in Matthew, confirms the motif of Jesus dining with marginalized

³⁷ M.G. Easton, *Easton's Bible Dictionary* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996), Leprosy.

³⁸ Leviticus 13:14; Numbers 5:1-4; 12:10-15

³⁹ Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, Mark 14:1-9.

⁴⁰ Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*.

⁴¹ Keener, Mk 14:3.

people. Simon may have previously been a leper. This previous condition may have engendered a lasting stigma and marginalization of Simon in his greater community. But Jesus' presence demonstrates his acceptance of those whom society would seek to marginalize. Jesus' associations with those labeled with marginalized terms is evidence of his continued practices and strategies of deviance to the cultural norms. Whether or not Simon was previously a leper Jesus' presence indicates he understood Simon's designation and engaged in table fellowship with him thereby extending acceptance of Simon. In summary Jesus positions himself as deviating from the Judaic cultural norms accepting table fellowship with marginalized people.

Jesus and the Beelzebul Caricature

The New Testament presents other examples of Jesus being portrayed as a cultural and religious deviant from the perspective of the Judaic religious leaders. One of the strongest is found in the Beelzebul caricature in Luke 11:14-23.⁴²

The Beelzebul caricature indicates that the religious elite thought Jesus' ability to cast out demons was devious in origin, that origin being Satan. This represents a direct labeling of Jesus as a deviant. D.A. Carson writes about this controversy, "The Pharisees thought that they could explain away the casting out of demons by saying that Jesus was empowered by the devil."⁴³ Carson also notes, "Others thought the matter could be settled if Jesus could provide some clearer sign that he had God's backing."⁴⁴ The Pharisees interpret the practices and strategies, particularly the practice of casting out demons, of Jesus as deviating from the

⁴² Parallel passages include Mt. 12:22-30, 43-45; Mk 3:22-27.

⁴³ D. A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), Lk 11:14-54.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

normative practices of his culture. Jewish exorcists were not uncommon, but possibly Jesus operated outside of sanctioned practices approved for them. Due to the reaction that the Judaic leadership expresses toward Jesus' practice of casting out demons they view Jesus as a deviant and label him as such. Wright asserts,

Accusing Jesus like this was, for the opponents, an ideal way not only of rejecting Jesus' message about the kingdom, but of launching a propaganda attack against him. 'Ah,' they were saying, 'don't just look at the outward effects! You need to understand what's going on behind. Then you'll see he's a scoundrel – in league with the devil himself!⁴⁵

It should be noted that Jesus' activities demonstrate a posturing of association not with the powerful within the culture, or the elite, but an association with the marginalized. This practice and strategy of associating with the marginalized brought attention to them. Jesus' practice of casting out demons and healing brought into view the lack of concern for the marginalized amid the cultural and religious leaders. Thereby, revealing their lack of concern for the poor and afflicted. The Pharisees inner attitudes towards the marginalized and afflicted were exposed for the community to view. Exposure, such as the Pharisees experience when Jesus cares for the marginalized and afflicted, creates a defensive posture and response. The Pharisees respond by attacking Jesus' character and person.

The use of semiotics was a defensive tactic by the Pharisees in an attempt to project certain imagery upon Jesus' character, thereby neutralizing Jesus by associating his ability to cast out demons with the prince of demons, Beelzebul. Association is a powerful political tool when dealing with a rival or what appears to be a challenge to the status quo. The use of the Beelzebul caricature would fall into this category. Wright comments about the use of the Beelzebul caricature, Beelzebul "was a kind of nickname, originally meaning something like

⁴⁵ N.T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 137.

‘Lord of the Flies.’ By Jesus’ day it was simply a way of referring to a personal source of evil without giving it, or him, a more precise definition.”⁴⁶ The semiotic strategy employed by the Pharisees attempts to discredit Jesus’ work of casting out demons by association. The Beelzebul imagery employed by Jesus’ accusers represents a denouncement of Jesus in order to label him as in league with the ultimate deviant, Satan. Jesus’ deviant practices and strategies challenged the status quo of the Judaic culture and religious leadership of his day. The defensive response from those whom Jesus challenged was to demonize him by association, thereby labeling him as deviant within the Judaic culture. The Pharisees in this text are clearly characterized as viewing Jesus as deviating from Judaic culture.

Jesus’ Use of Touch

When Jesus encounters a leper, in Matthew 8:1-4, the scene challenges the prevailing cultural norms. To be a leper in Christ’s time was to experience the ultimate in dehumanization. The narrative presents Jesus acting in direct conflict with the conventional wisdom and norms of his culture. The ensuing conflict is a direct result of Jesus being approached by a leper seeking healing. The narrative depicts Jesus performing the practice of one of the most humanizing behaviors we engage in, touch. Harrington writes about this encounter elaborating on the issue of touch, “According to Lev 5:3 Jesus himself might contract ritual uncleanness by touching the sources of uncleanness. But the NT account makes nothing of that idea. Instead Jesus’ touch is presented as the means by which the cure of the leper is brought about.”⁴⁷ Jesus appears to bring a new understanding that turns social

⁴⁶ Wright, 137.

⁴⁷ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 113.

conventions and conventional wisdom on its head concerning the corruption of those who are ritually clean by the unclean. The practice has been avoidance of the unclean. Jesus' practice of fearlessly touching the unclean goes against all social and religious protocols of Judaism.

Social conventions and conventional wisdom expects the holy or pure to be contaminated by the unclean or impure. Blomberg writes about this fundamental ideology, “. . . the notion that unclean people and objects constantly threatened to corrupt God's holy, elect nation and individuals within it. Like literal physical disease, we may think of ritual impurity as contagious.”⁴⁸ Impurity appears to act more like a disease or a universal contaminate with no exceptions. Yet, in this instance Jesus deviates from social convention and conventional wisdom by touching the leper, thereby conveying into the leper a healing of his leprosy. Further, Jesus appears to transmit ritual purity and holiness to the leper. Jesus demonstrates a remarkable willingness to extend compassion to a person who has been stigmatized and marginalized. What transpires in the event of Jesus touching and healing the leper is that a human being emerges who is able to rejoin his community. A new standard has been demonstrated in Jesus' willingness to practice touching those who were considered unclean by allowing his holiness to be transferred to the recipient.

Reflecting upon the biblical material, there are supporting events wherein Jesus uses touch in order to challenge Judaic traditional views as already witnessed in the text. By doing this Jesus uses his social proximity in order to aide those who were in need of redemption, the marginalized. Dr. MaryKate Morse in her article on *Jesus' use of Social Power*, notes several instances that illustrate Jesus' use of proximity.⁴⁹ First, Jesus encounters the

⁴⁸ Blomberg, 93.

⁴⁹ MaryKate Morse, “Jesus' Use of Social Power in Honour-Shame Conflicts - Crucible 1-2 October 2008.pdf”, (accessed November 8, 2011).

hemorrhaging woman who touched his clothing in Matthew 9:18-26 and is healed. Second, Jesus touches the leper in Matthew 8:1-4 and he is healed. Then Jesus receives blind Bartimaeus in Mark 10:46-52 and he is healed by recovering his sight. Morse asserts, “Jesus had a large amount of social power, but he used it in social settings to invite others into his personal space.”⁵⁰ In each instance Jesus confers to the individual physical healing and a restoration of social and communal status. Morse writes, “Physical proximity with Jesus had the power to heal and restore these persons to the community in a redeemed role.”⁵¹

Jesus represents new standards and expectations that are deviant, even counterintuitive, to the social construct of first century Judaism. Blomberg recognizes the lack of intuitiveness concerning the nature of holiness in the religious culture, he asserts, “The idea of a godly person’s holiness rubbing off on and transforming an unclean or unholy person scarcely seems to have been countenanced.”⁵² Jesus’ practices and strategies are counterintuitive to the first century Judaic conventional wisdom and established traditions, because he reverses the polarity of holiness where the unclean do not contaminate the pure, but the pure render the unclean holy. The practice and strategies reflect back to when Jesus initiated his ministry in Galilee quoting the prophet Isaiah concerning the signs he would engage, which included healing, as evidence of the year of the Lord’s favor.

Thus far the context of the narratives in the Gospels presents Jesus’ practices and strategies as deviant and counterintuitive to the Judaic social convention and their conventional wisdom. The Gospels witness that Jesus’ deviance is pervasive throughout the narratives. He challenges the social construct of first century Judaism as missing the

⁵⁰ Ibid., 8.

⁵¹ Ibid., 9.

⁵² Blomberg, 93.

intentions of God through his positive deviance practices and strategies. Therefore, in relationship to the context of Judaic cultural norms, societal construct and conventional wisdom, Jesus' strategies and practices are definable as socially deviant by the host culture.

Jesus' use of Social Space

In the narrative of the Gospels Jesus' activities transpire in social space. The use of proxemics⁵³ by Jesus in his social and cultural interactions deviates from the cultural norms of his time. According to Edward T. Hall, Anthropologist and Cross-cultural researcher, there are four areas of space and culture. His conclusion is that within these four spaces human beings create personalities, communications and culture. The four spaces Hall references are: public, social, personal, and intimate.⁵⁴ In first century Palestine there were culturally sanctioned norms amid the pluralistic society. Gary Ferraro, Professor of Anthropology, asserts, "Every society has defined what it considers to be normal, proper, or expected ways of behaving. These expectations serve as behavioral guidelines that help society work smoothly."⁵⁵ Through the exercise of the social norms via relational interactions a person's social importance is established. Concerning "social space" Morse concludes that within social interactions social control is developed. She writes, "Therefore, interactions in social

⁵³ "Proxemics," a term coined by Hall meaning "hidden dimension" is the study of how humans use space (Edward Hall, *The Hidden Dimension*, New York: Random House, 1969/1990). In 1968, Forston and Larson described proxemics as "the distance that man consciously or unconsciously maintains between himself and another person while relating physically to others with whom he is interacting." Robert Forston and Charles Larson, "The Dynamics of Space: An Experimental Study in Proxemic Behavior Among Latin Americans and North Americans," *The Journal of Communication* 18, (June 1968): 109-116. The study of proxemics has evolved into more sophisticated designations. See Stephen W. Littlejohn and Karen A. Foss, *Theories of Human Communication* (Boston, MA: Thomson Wadsworth Communication, 2005), 107-108; Seta M. Low and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga, *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).

⁵⁴ Edward Twitchell Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (Peter Smith Pub, 1992), 117-124.

⁵⁵ Gary P. Ferraro, *Cultural Anthropology: An Applied Perspective* (Thomson Wadsworth, 2006), 305.

spaces define who is seen and heard and valued, and who is not, who has power and who does not. Power is not brought into social space as an abstract concept.”⁵⁶ In other words a person’s social clout is established through the use of social space and proxemics. In this portion of the study the question is asked, did Jesus deviate from socially normative behavior in order to engage marginalized people?

It is necessary here to briefly address the issue of collectivist and individualist cultures. The general audience reading this study is oriented toward Western culture with its predisposition toward individualism.⁵⁷ There is a significant difference between collectivist and individualist cultures. David Myers gives a description of the individualist culture as centered upon the individual’s rights, values and pursuits apart from the general or greater culture. He writes, “. . . this peculiarly American idea (individualism) does find support in recent studies of optimism, achievement motivation, internal ‘locus of control,’ and self-efficacy.”⁵⁸ He also notes the relationship of individualism with democracy, “Individualism supports democracy by stimulating initiative, creativity, and equal rights for all individuals.”⁵⁹ An example of the individualism is the rampant materialism and consumerism existing in western culture. Western civilization has the individual as the apex of cultural values not the collective society. Myers writes, “Western cultures nurture individualism.”⁶⁰ This is the native perception of the western cultural reader. Collectivist cultural values are distinctive from individualist cultural values and present a conflict in perspective.

Collectivist cultures, according to Myers, value the greater good of the community

⁵⁶ Morse, 1.

⁵⁷ Myers, *The American Paradox*, 162.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 163.

over the individual. The collectivist motto, “The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few,”⁶¹ gives a clear perspective of collectivist ideology. Myers writes, “Collectivist cultures give priority to the goals and welfare of their groups – their family, their clan, and their work group.”⁶² In collectivist cultures the value of solidarity, loyalty and harmony flow as a deep current in the culture. An example of the collectivism in action is the sustained generational family that lives together for the benefit of all the members: as compared to the individualist culture that espouses the highest value is loyalty to oneself. Myers goes onto describe collectivist cultures, “Collectivist also do favors for one another and, remembering who has done favors for them, make reciprocation an art. In their cultures, no one is an island. The self is not independent but *interdependent*.”⁶³ Collectivist cultures seek to operate in a holistic cultural environment and not an individualist environment.

When addressing the issue of Jesus’ interactions in social spaces, it must be remembered that the Judaic culture is based in collectivism and not individualism. The activities of Jesus in the narrative of the Gospels flow from this cultural nuance of collectivism. In each of the previous scenes the prevailing cultural pressure is to maintain the status quo of the community. The issue for Jesus is the cultural status quo in the communal collectivism of Judaism that has been rendered compassionless, self-centered and self-promoting. His earlier declaration in Luke 4, Jesus is proclaiming the year of the Lord’s favor. The Gospel, the good news, is for those who are marginalized and outcast from the community. Jesus’ practices and strategies challenge the cultural status quo to transform and

⁶¹ The collectivist saying appears to have its roots from Caiaphas, the high priest. In John 11:49-50, “Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, ‘You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.’”

⁶² Myers, 164.

⁶³ Ibid., 169.

adapt to the presence of the Kingdom of God in the midst of Israel.

Cultural change is difficult and complex mainly due to human perception⁶⁴ because culture surrounds all human society. People are immersed in their culture as a swimmer is immersed in water or like a person riding a bike functions as one with it. The flow of culture upon those who are within it goes almost unnoticed by the occupants. Jesus enters his culture and has an intuitive awareness of his deviance to the social construct as he challenges the status quo to change and engage the Kingdom of God from a new perspective and way.

Jesus intentionally deviated from the cultural norms of shunning the unclean and marginalized amid Judaic culture. His deviance was a direct response in correcting unequal social relationships and injustices experienced by the marginalized who suffer at the hands of the status quo. Morse asserts, “Jesus’ use of power drew into visibility, into the eyesight of the crowd, the stewardship of honour to the marginalized.”⁶⁵ Her study goes on to examine the struggle within social space for power. She draws out the prevailing social issue of using social power for self promotion or social clout, where as the Jesus’ practices and strategies deviate by not seeking self promotion, but the restoration of others through the use of social clout. Morse writes, “Jesus used these social events to redistribute power and to challenge traditional views of value and honour.”⁶⁶ Jesus’ practices and strategies, particularly in the use of social space, are counterintuitive in the cultural setting. The characters in the events find themselves in different social positions due to the reality of Jesus redistributing the social clout.

The writer of Luke narrates what could be considered a shocking event in Luke 7:36-

⁶⁴ Ferraro, *Cultural Anthropology*, 405- 429.

⁶⁵ Morse, 9.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

50. Morse uses this specific event to emphasize the Jesus model of using social space as redemptive space. In this event the appropriate welcoming rituals were not extended to Jesus. Simon, who understands the laws and codes, appears too purposefully omit the ritual in order to set up a challenge of Jesus' honor. The woman appears in the story and observes that the proper ritual has not been extended to Jesus. She acts to make up for what Simon neglected to perform by supplying tears for water to wash Jesus' feet, dries his feet with her hair, kisses and anoints his feet. In response Jesus compared the hospitality of the woman with Simons. Morse asserts,

Jesus' uses of her public actions also suggested that she became the righteous one, rather than Simon, as she was the one bestowing the hospitality. Simon, the righteous Pharisee, became the sinner, who acted to preserve his own status at the expense of Jesus and the women. Simon lost status. Jesus exercised his power and lost nothing.⁶⁷

Morse' observation that the reversal of positions of 'sinner' and 'righteous' between Simon and the woman was due to Jesus' use of his proxemics. The examples presented in this study, and there are many more that could addressed, of the gospel writers presents the perspective that Jesus deviated from the Judaic cultural norms and conventional wisdom. His practices and strategies were in the form of the Positive Deviance Approach, in order to challenge and bring awareness of the inequities and injustices marginalized people and groups experienced at the hands of the mainline culture or the status quo. Morse concludes, "Wherever Jesus traveled, he used his power to catalyze a re-formation of thinking about hospitality, outsiders, interpretation of the law, economic systems, and the practice of the religious system."⁶⁸ The marginalized are valued in the perspective of Jesus and are the focus of God's favor.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 8.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 7.

Conclusion and Implications

Throughout the Gospel narratives the view of Jesus may be interpreted as a person who acted as a positive deviant. What these few select events represent is a perspective of Jesus as a positive deviant within first century Judaic culture. The evidence of this labeling of Jesus as a deviant is the disapproval that was leveled against him by the Pharisees, the scribes and the Chief Priests, those who appear in the narrative to have social position and power to directly affect the lives of the marginalized. Sullivan and Thompson assert, “A key element of the sociological approach to deviance is that it is a function of the judgments of particular groups. Behaviors and characteristics are deviant *because they are so defined by a particular group.*”⁶⁹ The Judaic culture demonstrates the sociological markers that determine the acceptance or rejection of the practices and strategies of Jesus.

Jesus’ practices and strategies went against the prevailing status quo. The inclusion of Gentiles in the eschatological visitation of God, table fellowship with those whom the general culture deems as unacceptable and attributing Jesus’ ability to cast out demons as originating from a demonic source are just a few examples of how Judaic culture considered Jesus to be a deviant. Sullivan and Thompson write,

Some people approach deviance in an *absolute* way, judging certain behaviors and characteristics to be good or bad and right or wrong by comparing them to some fixed standards. Religious views of deviance, for example, often reflect this approach, with some divinely revealed truth representing the ‘standard.’⁷⁰

Jesus’ most dramatic examples of positive deviance challenged the Judaic cultural norms involve his use of social space. In each instance cited in this study the practices and strategies of Jesus take place in social space and exhibit his use of social power. Jesus’ practices and

⁶⁹ Sullivan, *Sociology--Concepts, Issues, and Applications*, 143.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

strategies in each of these events create a redemptive environment and the restoration of the marginalized. Concerning Jesus' use of social space, Morse writes, "The purpose of 'taking up space' is not to enhance or secure one's personal influence, but to enhance the influence and well-being of those who need redemption or restoration, whether individual or cultural."⁷¹ Jesus' use of proxemics in social spaces throughout the Gospels appears to bring redemption and restoration for individuals and groups.

The positive deviance practices and strategies Jesus exercised were for the express purpose of creating an environment of change by subverting the status quo. The subverting of the status quo was accomplished through upsetting the equilibrium in the traditional social spaces amid the Judaic community. This subversion creates tension for the community's orthodoxies resulting in undesirable consequences for the stakeholders whom Jesus challenged. Jesus challenged the issue of cultural imperialism.⁷² Therefore, by following Jesus' practices and strategies, through challenging the cultural imperialism of the modern contemporary and institutional church, allows the church to engage marginalized people and groups by creating redemptive and restorative environments. Through these environments marginalized people may experience their humanity, gain acceptance and value as part of the community elevating stigmas, but not removing them from connecting within their culture. Through the Gospels narratives the early church was saturated with Jesus' practices and strategies. What can be concluded is that the practices and strategies of Jesus intuitively reflect the Positive Deviance Approach. Jesus worked from within his context, the Judaic culture, in order to effect change within the Judaic culture. He did this through the use of the

⁷¹ Morse, 8.

⁷² Cultural imperialism is the overlaying of a one culture over another culture in order to obliterate the underlying culture, Ray Sherman Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches* (InterVarsity Press, 2006), 55.

resources available in order to help create a new identity for the marginalized people. His practices and strategies were distinctive and challenged the traditional and conventional wisdom of the Judaic culture. His practices and strategies laid a foundation for a sustainable movement. Finally, Jesus challenged his followers to act into a new way of thinking rather than think their way into a new way of acting by inviting his disciples to follow his example. Jesus was essentially a practitioner of the Positive Deviance Approach.

The activities the early church engages in emulate the practices and strategies of Jesus would eventually lead to the subversion of an exclusive Judaic Christianity. The next chapter of this paper will show the early church's practices and strategies were based in following the Jesus' modeling and how they were able to practice contextualization as the normative practice amid the Gentiles.

CHAPTER THREE

CHURCH HISTORY AND THOUGHT

Adopt vs. adapt

An early adopter seeks out new ideas and makes them work.

An adapter, on the other hand, puts up with what he has to, begrudgingly.

*One is offense, the other is defense. One requires the spark of curiosity,
the other is associated with fear, or at least hassle.*

Hint: it's not so easy to sell to the adapt community.

--Seth Godin

The Early Church

Jesus' practices and strategies were deviant in relationship to the depiction of the prevailing Judaic culture. The practices Jesus exemplified followed what is referred to as the Positive Deviance Approach; it is the process of changing culture from within the culture.¹ Jesus' practices and strategies subverted the traditional Judaic views of holiness through the inclusion of Gentiles and the marginalized. He engaged the hegemony of those who were in power and challenged the prevailing culture. Jesus' actions were culturally relevant and his practices and strategies were humanly relevant through his redemptive engagement of those who were marginalized. The Gospel is humanly real, it is good news for all humanity not just a select few. Jesus, himself, is the prototype for the early churches practices and strategies.

In this section of the paper the attention turns to the early church and its relationship to the pluralistic culture of the first century. Jesus set the example by modeling his practices and strategies within the culture. These practices and strategies were embedded in the narrative of the Gospels. The early church received these narratives initially through an oral tradition. The implication is the Gospels were presented in a dramatic manner to the hearers thereby, creating a connection by drawing the hearers directly into the story of Jesus

¹ Pascale et al., *The Power of Positive Deviance*, 3.

challenging the status quo. How did the narrative of the Gospels inspire the early church to follow Jesus' model of deviance challenging the prevailing cultures status quo? Did the early church retain continuity with the way of Jesus? If the early church did follow Jesus' model, how is it witnessed in church history presented in the book of Acts?

The Jerusalem Church

The emergence of the early church found itself in the context of Judaic culture within a pluralistic society under Roman rule. Within the Judaic culture there were several sects of Judaism including Sadducees, Pharisees, Zealots and Essenes. Scholars' debate whether or not there were more or less, but there was clearly no homogeneous group of Judaic practitioners.² Each sect found its authentication in the Torah, but a broad distinctive of differing views of what constituted authoritative scripture and appropriate Temple worship divided the groups.³

Justo L. González asserts that the cultural context of the early church was clearly established within this milieu of Judaism and their traditions. The early community of Christ-followers considered themselves to be intrinsically part of the Jewish culture. González writes,

The earliest Christians did not consider themselves followers of a new religion. All their lives they had been Jews and they still were. This was true of Peter and the twelve, of the seven and of Paul. Their faith was not a denial of Judaism, but rather the conviction that the Messianic age had finally arrived. . . . The earliest Christians did not reject Judaism, but were convinced that their faith was the fulfillment of the age-long expectation of a Messiah.⁴

² D. R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary* (InterVarsity Press, 1996), 914.

³ Murphy, *Early Judaism*, 213–244.

⁴ Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity* (Prince Press, 1999), 20.

Christianity emerged into a specific culture at a specific time and place.⁵ Cultural context is a vital consideration in the ecclesial genesis of the early Christian church within the culture of Palestinian Judaism. The first Christians were of Jewish persuasion, but some of them were from the Diaspora and are referred to as Hellenistic Jews.⁶ Christian Historian Charles Freeman writes, “. . . Jewish communities that had successfully negotiated a status for themselves within the wider empire. . . . When Greek culture was dominant in the eastern Mediterranean, some ‘Hellenisation’ . . . was inevitable.”⁷ The Judaic cultural milieu was the seedbed for the early church. González writes, “. . . the church was never disconnected from the world around it. The first Christians were first century Jews, and it was as such that they heard and received the message.”⁸ The earliest form of Christian church was established and contained within Judaism.

The early indicators of culture are evidenced in the practices and strategies of the early Hebrew church found in the book of Acts. Acts 2:42-47 is the narrative of the early church as it formulated in the Judaic culture,

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.⁹

The practices and strategies evident in the pericope indicate a continuation, or at least continuity, with Jesus' modeled practices and strategies.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Charles Freeman, *A New History of Early Christianity* (Yale University Press, 2009).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ González, 7.

⁹ Acts 2:42-47.

There does not appear to be any distinctions made between ethos in the text, but it is noted that this early form of ecclesia in Jerusalem is contained within the Judaic context.¹⁰ Keener expresses concern that the language of the pericope in Acts uses the language reflecting that of the Pythagoreans concept of a utopian society.¹¹ Luke Timothy Johnson and Daniel J. Harrington, Distinguished New Testament Scholars, asserts that there “is an unmistakable allusion to the Hellenistic *topos* concerning friendship, that ‘friends hold all things in common.’ The proverb itself is widely distributed and was a feature of utopian visions of society.”¹² This particular portion of scripture has led to the idealization of the early church as a utopian and communal society. Luke’s account appears to be attempting to image a pattern of continuing and consistent behavior in the early ecclesia. Ray S. Anderson writes, “The church at Jerusalem began to take shape even prior to Pentecost based on the felt need for continuity and the constitution of a central point of authority and control.”¹³ The narrative imagery in Acts does present more information, a fuller picture of the cultural angst at work in the background in what follows the utopian communal account.

¹⁰ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 30.

¹¹ Keener asserts, “The Greek language Luke uses here is language that Pythagoreans and others used for the ideal, utopian community. Those who have argued that the early church made a mistake in 2:44–45 are thus reading their own views into the Bible, not hearing Luke’s message, because Luke portrays this radical lifestyle as the result of the outpouring of the Spirit. Some Jewish groups, like the group that lived at Qumran, followed the Pythagorean model and turned all their possessions over to the leaders of the community so they could all withdraw from society. That is hardly the case here, although the economic sharing is no less radical. The early Christians acknowledge that Jesus owns both them and their property (cf. 4:32); they sell off property to meet needs as they arise (4:34–35) and open their homes as meeting places for fellow Christians (2:46). These actions do not reflect an ascetic ideal, as in some Greek and Jewish sects, but instead the practice of radically valuing people over possessions. Such behavior reportedly continued among Christians well into the second century, and it was long ridiculed by pagans until pagan values finally overwhelmed the church,” Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, Acts 2:42.

¹² Luke Timothy Johnson and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Liturgical Press, 1992), 58–59.

¹³ Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches*, 23.

The Hellenists

In the background there still linger cultural distinctions of the sectarianism resulting from regional and cultural origins within the early church community. The early distinctions were made between the Hebrew/Palestinian Jews and the Diaspora/Hellenized Jews. Acts 6:1 records, “. . . the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food.” This portion of scripture gives the account of how distinctions were made between the Hebrews and the Hellenists. Wood and Marshall delineate the differences,

The earliest occurrence of the word (Hellenists) in Greek literature is in Acts 6:1, where it denotes a group of Jewish Christians in the primitive church of Jerusalem, distinguished from the ‘Hebrews’ (*hebraioi*), who were probably Aramaic-speaking. The seven almoners¹⁴, including Stephen and Philip, appointed in response to the Hellenists’ complaint that the ‘Hebrew’ widows were being favoured over theirs in the distribution of charity from the common fund, all appear by their names to have been Hellenists (Acts 6:5). Many of the Hellenists would have connections with the Diaspora, whereas most of the Hebrews would be Palestinian Jews.¹⁵

There is no indication of a Gentile presence in the Jerusalem church at this point, but the Hellenists are clearly present. The conflict that arose concerning the distribution of food amid the widows was clearly between Jewish Christians of differing cultural origins and perspectives, Palestinian Christians and the Hellenist Christians. The discontinuity witnessed in the pericope indicates the initial inclusion of others as exemplified by Jesus’ practices and strategies was not yet normative amid the Jerusalem Christians. For some reason the issue of holding onto traditions of separation by ethos or sectarianism that Jesus challenged still appears in the early church. Flemming asserts, “Perhaps we could say that the Jerusalem believers unconsciously ‘inculturate’ the newness of the gospel into their own Jewish

¹⁴ An **almoner** is an officer, often of holy orders, who has the duty of alms distribution to the poor, E. A. Livingstone, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 16.

¹⁵ Wood and Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, 464.

heritage.”¹⁶ The implication is that the early church community brought with them their communal orthodoxies at the expense of the praxis and orthopathy¹⁷ of Jesus.

A solution to the crisis was worked out demonstrating a transition of praxis and orthopathy, González comments on the transition,

. . . the twelve called an assembly that appointed seven men ‘to serve tables.’ . . . the idea was that the seven would have administrative tasks, and the twelve would continue preaching and teaching. . . . it would seem that all seven were ‘Hellenists,’ for they had Greek names. Thus, the naming of the seven would appear as an attempt to give greater voice in the affairs of the church to the Hellenistic party, while the twelve, all ‘Hebrews,’ would continue being the main teachers and preachers.¹⁸

The solution offered by the Apostles (the acting council) establishes what appears to be a satisfactory solution, but it still indicates a sense that a sectarian division still exists with the ‘Hebrews’ (Jerusalem Christians) as the authoritative power. When persecution broke out it began with the Hellenist, Stephen became the first martyr in Acts 7:54-8:1, but the Apostles appear unaffected by the persecution. Johnson and Harrington write,

. . . the persecution in Jerusalem that affects everyone but the apostles (8:1) serves as an ideal narrative transition. . . . the tension in Luke’s narrative from this point on has to do with the dialectic of rejection and acceptance, and with humans trying their best to catch up to God’s action in the world.¹⁹

A line of demarcation in the narrative appears between the Hebrew and the Hellenists with the Hellenists becoming the target of the persecution. González asserts that there existed a distinction between the Hebrews and the Hellenists during the early persecution,

¹⁶ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 31. Flemming references Anthony T. Lincoln, “Pentecost,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Development*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997), p. 905. This is supported by the clear impression given by Luke that the entire crowd understood Peter’s sermon, which was likely delivered in Aramaic (Acts 2:14ff.).

¹⁷ Orthopathy is a recent term entering into theological conversations, it refers to *right affections*, as orthodoxy indicates *right doctrines*, and Orthopraxy indicates *right practices* (italics are mine).

¹⁸ González, 19.

¹⁹ Johnson and Harrington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 150.

. . . when persecution finally broke out and Christians had to flee Jerusalem, the apostles were able to remain. . . . Saul seemed to ignore them. All this would seem to indicate that the earliest persecution was aimed mostly at the ‘Hellenistic’ Christians, and that the ‘Hebrews’ had much less difficulty.²⁰

The indication is the “Hebrew” Christians remained adequately enough within the Judaic traditions and practices thereby avoiding the initial persecution. This raises questions about the strategies and practices the Hebrew church used in relationship to Jesus’ example in the Gospels.

The Hellenists Christians appear to have adopted Jesus’ practices and strategies that subvert the cultural norms within the Judaic traditions. They reaped the consequences and initially become the first bearers of the Gospel to the surrounding regions. Flemming observes, “. . . we see the actualization of the boundary-shattering work of the Spirit, as the gospel moves incrementally from a singularly Jewish to a multicultural sphere of influence.”²¹ The Hellenists became the source of the socio-cultural expansion of Christianity, the ones who bridge the cultural barriers. The Hebrew church, on the other hand, appears to remain solidly within the Judaic tradition.

The Hebrew Christians appear to have an apparent acceptability within the Judaic community, thereby allowing them to remain in Jerusalem. The Hebrew church does not appear to have continuity in adopting the practices and strategies Jesus modeled in the Gospels. At least not at a comparable level that distinguished them as with Hellenist Christians assimilation of Jesus’ example. The direct socio-cultural bridging of Christianity begins with and would be dominated by the “Hellenist,” the Greek cultured Judaic Christ followers.

²⁰ González, 19.

²¹ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 31.

Stephen and Philip

Thus began the socio-cultural transition of Christianity away from a singular Judaic cultural to a pluralistic Gentile culture. This transition appears to be dominated solely by the Hellenists Christians and not originating from the Hebrew Christians. Wood and Marshall assert,

To judge from Stephen and Philip, the Hellenists in the Jerusalem church were more forward-looking than the Hebrews, in teaching and practice alike. In the persecution which broke out after Stephen's death, it was mainly the Hellenists who were scattered, propagating the gospel wherever they went.²²

The Hellenists possessed the ability to relate cross-culturally where as the Hebrew church was less adaptable and incapable of acting cross-culturally. The characteristic of speaking Greek and Aramaic gave the Hellenists a definitive advantage in cross-cultural engagement. In addition to speaking multiple languages the Hellenists, usually from the Diaspora, were accustomed to interacting within a pluralist pagan culture.

The Hellenist experience does not appear to view interaction with non-Jews as a potential source of corruption of a person's status of purity or holiness. Blomberg makes the assertion that Jesus' activities were in direct conflict with the conventional Judaic wisdom that the holy would be contaminated by the impure. As was shown in the last section, according to Blomberg's assertions, the prevailing wisdom within Judaic culture was that the pure could be contaminated, as though by a disease, by the impure. Jesus directly challenged this notion by his healing of the leper, thereby cleansing him.²³ It may be possible that the descriptive Christology in the narrative of the Gospels, modeled by Jesus' willingness to

²² Wood and Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, 464.

²³ Blomberg, 93.

touch the leper, proved for the Hellenist Christians that holiness maybe transferred to another without corrupting the giver.

Therefore, the transformation of the church moves from a completely Judaic culture to a broader ethnic inclusion of the Hellenists. This broader inclusion establishes a trajectory of orthopraxy and orthopathy that is in continuity with the incarnation of Jesus, the descriptive Christology of the Gospels. Though the Twelve retained their prominence in the appointing of the seven, their practice and strategy began a process of subverting the Judaic tradition of cultural imperialism. The Twelve, by transferring leadership to the seven follow a positive deviance approach by initiating the transfer of the Gospel into a broader cultural context that is no longer solely of Judaic origins. According to Johnson and Harrington, Luke is attempting to project the transition of leadership from the Judaic traditions to the Hellenists Greek orientation, thereby setting the trajectory toward the establishment of the Gentile church. Johnson and Harrington assert,

Now Luke wants to show how spiritual authority was bestowed on those who would carry the gospel to the Diaspora. He needs to show that these Hellenistic missionaries were fully prophetic figures, like the Twelve; but he also wanted to show that their authority is derived from that of the Twelve and in continuity with it. He accomplishes both tasks by having the seven placed over the distribution of goods. The transfer of spiritual power (through the laying on of hands) is symbolized by the taking on of ‘table service’ (as it was for Jesus and the Twelve).²⁴

The transfer of the spiritual authority to the Hellenist validates their ministry amid the broader community and representative ethos in and around Jerusalem. This is demonstrated through Stephen, the Hellenist, who becomes a prominent character in the narrative of Acts 6-7. His prominence as a leader amid the Hellenists is emphasized by Luke. N.T. Wright concludes, “Stephen, it seems, was at home in the wider world of Greek-speaking Jews. Such

²⁴ Johnson and Harrington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Acts 6:1-15.

people were by no means necessarily ‘soft’ on the law and the Temple when compared with their Aramaic-speaking, native-Judaeans, Jewish cousins.”²⁵ Stephen, along with Phillip, who is mentioned later as another prominent character portrayed by Luke, are narrated as prophets continuing the ministry of the Apostles amid the Hellenists and into the Gentile culture, Johnson and Harrington assert,

The seven were selected precisely to be ‘in charge of this responsibility’ of the daily distribution (6:3). But although the entire narrative from this point until the end of chapter 8 is devoted to two of the seven (Stephen and Philip), neither of them has the slightest connection to the ‘service of the tables.’ Instead, they are portrayed as *prophets* who continue the work of the twelve: they are filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, they preach God’s word, and they work signs and wonders among the people. The sole difference is the sphere of their activity: Stephen disputes the Hellenistic Jews in the city, Philip begins the preaching to Samaria and Judea.²⁶

Scattered Amid Samaria and Judea

The scattering of the Hellenist Christians into Samaria and Judea allows for a reset of the Jesus model amid his followers by renewing his practices and strategies amid them. Stephen and Philip were the initial Hellenist prophets that moved the gospel forward. Stephen challenged second-Temple Judaism and the Temple-theology that was prevalent. In doing so he went directly against the highest held traditions of the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem. He elevates the practices and strategies of Jesus by following a similar agenda through the use of social space to effectively communicate the Gospel. Wright asserts,

He takes to a new level the charge which Peter and the others have been laying, all through, against the Jewish leaders of the day. It isn’t just that they rejected God’s Messiah, the Righteous One, and handed him over to be killed by the pagans. In doing so, they were simply acting out, at long range, the pattern of rebellious behaviour set by their ancestors. Instead of the recounting of Israel’s history becoming a ‘story of salvation’, as so often, it turns out to be a ‘story of rebellion’. Stephen is claiming the high moral ground. He stands with Abraham, with Moses,

²⁵ N. T. Wright, *Acts for Everyone, Part One* (Presbyterian Pub Corp, 2008), 104–105.

²⁶ Johnson and Harrington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Acts 6:1-15.

with David and Solomon, and with the prophets, while the present Jewish leadership are standing with Joseph's brothers, with the Israelites who rejected Moses, and with those who helped Aaron build and worship the golden calf.²⁷

Stephen appears to demonstrate a clear familiarity with Jesus' interactions with the various leaders within the Judaic culture through the transference of power in social space. In the previous chapter it was demonstrated that Jesus used social space at the dinner given in his honor by Simon the Leper in order to transfer social power between Simon and the disreputable woman. Stephen follows a similar pattern that emulates this descriptive Christology of the Gospels. He appears to become the teacher to the Sanhedrin. The altercation unfortunately led to his martyrdom.

Philip on the other hand went to the Samaritans. The pattern is similar to Jesus' various trips through Samaritan territory.²⁸ Philip, the Hellenist, crosses a cultural barrier to engage the Samaritans. The practice and strategy of cross-cultural engagement was endorsed by Jesus at the announcement of his mission in Galilee. The cross-cultural engagement deviates from Judaic norms of the separation of ethos. This cross-cultural action of engaging the Samaritans is the precursor of the mission to the Gentiles. The Samaritans were considered a peripheral and marginalized people. Philip breaks a long held cultural barrier. Flemming writes about Philip's practice and strategy of bridging this threshold,

First, he preaches to a group of people who were social, political and religious rivals of the Jews, the Samaritans (Acts 8:4-25). For Luke they were not Jews in the strict sense, although they remained on the fringes of Judaism. Rather, the Samaritans 'stood as a halfway house between the Jewish and Gentile worlds leading to a transition to the Gentile mission.'²⁹

²⁷ Wright, 119.

²⁸ Matthew 19:1-2, Mark 10:1, Luke 9:51, John 4:1-42.

²⁹ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 33-34. P.U. Maynard-Reid, "Samaria," in Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments* (InterVarsity Press, 1997), 1076.

Philip uses the cultural relevance of the relationship between the Jews and the Samaritans as a way to break the ethnic barrier in order to share the Gospel. Philip's practices and strategies are in direct continuity with the way of Jesus by engaging marginalized people. Philip's venture into the Samaritan communities serves as a trajectory of moving the gospel into multicultural expressions beyond the Judaic context. Johnson and Harrington assert,

The Samaritans are not Gentiles. Indeed they lay claim – not without some justice – to being an ancient and deeply traditional form of the religion of Israel. In their eyes, it was the Judeans who were the interlopers and innovators. But in the eyes of contemporary Judeans, they were at best among the 'lost sheep' of Israel. The evangelization of them by Philip therefore continues the work of Jesus in reaching out to the marginal and outcast among the people and inviting them to a full participation in the restored people of God forming around the Prophet whom God raised up.³⁰

The implication of this quote is that God is actively in pursuit of other ethos through the spreading of the Gospel by the Hellenists. The text indicates that the practices and strategies of the Hellenists follow in continuity with those of Jesus. The emphasis of the narrative clearly engages the Hellenists as the candidates to overcome the barriers of cross-cultural missions. The ability is due to the familiarity the Hellenists possess in the arena of engaging multiple cultures in the Diaspora. As the Hellenists travel to the surrounding territories God prepares the Jerusalem church for development of the Gentile mission through Peter's visions and encounter with the household of Cornelius.

Overcoming Exclusion

The narrative of Acts develops incrementally the progression of the theme that the Gospel is going to all nations and not limited to just the Jerusalem context. Peter's encounter with Cornelius in Acts 10 begins the unfolding of the progression of the narrative. Acts 10

³⁰ Johnson and Harrington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Acts 8:4–25.

and 11 develops the validation of Gentile conversions, thereby opening the Gospels engagement in the Gentile mission. The validation of Gentile conversions comes as a post-script to the Hellenists moving into Samaria and Judea. Luke's account of Peter's vision appears as the Spirit authorizing the establishment and the credibility of a mission to the Gentiles.³¹ The text is meticulously detailed about the event validating Gentile conversions. The details note almost every aspect of the event in order to add validity to ethnic barrier breaking practices and strategies that have transpired already in the narrative of Acts.³² What comes into view is a critical moment in the narrative for the movement of the Gospel from the Judaic cultural context into the Gentile milieu.

This critical moment views two conversions, first, Cornelius and his household representing the Gentiles and second, a theological conversion of Peter as the representative of the Hebrew Christian church.³³ This event represents a paradigm shift in the reality perceived by the Hebrew church represented in Jerusalem. In Acts 11:1-18, Peter is called to give an account for his actions before what appears to be the council of Apostles and elders in Jerusalem. The questions indicate the council had certain expectation concerning engaging Gentiles. These expectations appear to be fully in line with Judaic conventional wisdom. Wright elaborates an approximation of Peter's understanding before this event, he writes,

Peter knew that Jews who wanted to belong to the new movement had had to repent of sin (Acts 2.38). Up to now, he would have said that Gentiles, if they wanted to belong, would have had to become Jews as well. But the point which is being made in this graphic and deeply human story (complete with Cornelius' understandable and over-enthusiastic faux pas of falling down and worshipping Peter, and Peter telling him quickly to get up) is that, though Gentiles too had to repent and believe in Jesus

³¹ Wright, *Acts for Everyone*, 169.

³² Johnson and Harrington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 187.

³³ Flemming, 36.

just as Jews did, they did not have to become Jews before or after that process.³⁴ Those gathered, who cross examined Peter's experience, appear to make the assumption that in order to proselyte Gentiles certain conditions of conversion were essential, conversion to "Judaism" and then to receive "baptism alongside circumcision to signify conversion."³⁵ The event of Gentiles receiving the baptism of the Spirit without circumcision challenges the assumptions of the Jerusalem Christians, Keener asserts, ". . . if God had Baptized someone in his Spirit, he had certainly accepted their conversion – with or without circumcision."³⁶ The assumption that Gentiles had to convert to Judaism in order to be saved has its foundation thoroughly removed.

Peter is found in the center of this controversy and must present a valid argument in support of this new practice and strategy of acceptance of Gentile conversions without circumcision and proselytism. The paradigm shift in the narrative of Acts challenges the assumptions of the Apostles and the Jerusalem church, thereby it "spotlights the theme of God's plan to bring salvation in its fullness to all people, both Jew and Gentile."³⁷ This perturbed the orthodoxies of the Jerusalem Christian community or at least the hard line Jewish Christians (Judiazers) who formed the party of the circumcision.

It appears the Jewish hard liners considered themselves the major stakeholders, now they face an undesirable, yet inevitable outcome, the inclusion of the Gentiles without circumcision and the Law of Moses. The council finds itself in the uncomfortable position of confirming that salvation had indeed been extended to the Gentiles through the witness of the

³⁴ Wright, 164–165.

³⁵ Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, Acts 11:16–17.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Flemming, 29.

Holy Spirit being poured out upon them. This event provides the critical mass needed, in the form of cultural clout with power to extend the Gospel, by allowing the Gentile mission to continue without the necessity of Jewish conversion and circumcision. In human perspective it is an unintentional contextualization of the Gospel, but the divine witness of the Spirit indicates it is within God's intentions that Gospel spread amid the Gentiles. Flemming asserts that contextualization of the Gospel to a Gentile context is the aim of Luke-Acts, he writes,

Luke-Acts attempts to explain and defend God's saving project to Hellenized Christians in a way that would speak to their needs and thought world. . . . Acts could also provide the Gentile church with theological legitimacy by proclaiming that, in spite of Jewish rejection of the gospel, it stands in continuity with Israel and the ministry of Jesus as the fulfillment of God's plan promised in Scripture. In important ways, then, Acts is an intercultural document. It transposes a story that is grounded in the Hebrew Scriptures, as well as the Jewish identity of Jesus and the early Jerusalem church, into a Greco-Roman cultural setting."³⁸

The barrier that existed between the Jews and Gentiles has been removed. The implication is that an empowered contextualization with a new theological praxis is transpiring through the intervention of God. The exclusion of other ethos has lost its defense through the intervention of God's Spirit baptizing the Gentiles. This is no less than a validation of Jesus' practices and strategies.

The paradigm shift opens the way for practices and strategies that are deviant to the long held Judaic traditions regarding inclusion of Gentiles within Israel. Peter's leadership affirms one of the basic premises of Positive Deviance leadership through his address of the Council, "Leadership begins with reframing the challenge in a compelling way so as to engage others in generating an alternative future."³⁹ This paradigm shift allowed for an alternative future by creating an inclusive environment allowing the Gentiles to enter into

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Pascale et al., *The Power of Positive Deviance*, 193.

salvation without unnecessary constraints and expectations. Wright comments about this progression, “. . . the message has now reached out to embrace not only Gentiles but Romans. From here, it may be a long step geographically but it’s only a short step culturally to everywhere else in the then known world.”⁴⁰ The bridge is in place and the Hellenist Christians would use it in their practices and strategies. The Gentile mission would begin in Antioch.

Antioch

Christianity spread to Antioch with the Hellenists thereby introducing the Gospel into Gentile cultures and amid the Hellenist Jews in the Diaspora.⁴¹ Acts chapter 11 reflects the continuation of the practices and strategies that brought about the bridging of cultural boundaries. The cross-cultural practices of the Hellenists countered the limitations of the church in Jerusalem (its desire to retain a Judaic cultural context). The Hellenist Christians spread the Gospel amid the Greeks. The narrative reflects the beginning of the Gentile church in Antioch without great detail. There exists some textual criticism in the manuscripts of Acts as to whether or not the Hellenist Christians went amid the Hellenist Jews or amid the Greeks. Wood and Marshall argue that it is clear that the Hellenist Christians not only address the Hellenist Jews in the Diaspora, they definitively went amid the Greeks, they assert,

In Acts 11:20 the MS44S are divided between ‘Hellenists’ (*hellēnistās*) and ‘Greeks’ (*hellēnas*), with the weight of evidence favouring the former. Whichever reading be preferred, the context makes it plain that the reference is to Gentile residents of Antioch, to whom Christian visitors, ‘men of Cyprus and Cyrene’, took the initiative in preaching the gospel, whereas their associates on first coming to Antioch had

⁴⁰ Wright, *Acts for Everyone*, 167.

⁴¹ González, 12-14, 23-30.

preached it ‘to none except Jews’ (Acts 11:19). If they were not Greeks (*hellēnes*) by origin, they could have belonged to other ethnic groups in Antioch which had adopted Greek language and culture.⁴²

The implication is that certain terms, such as ‘Hellenists’ and ‘Greeks’, indicate the use of a broad definition as in this case. The first multicultural ecclesia emerges in Antioch. It appears in the text that the practice of first going to the Jews and then to the Gentiles has its roots in the mission work of the Hellenists before it became Paul’s practice.⁴³ The Antioch church is the first indication of a community of Christ followers outside of Jerusalem.⁴⁴ The practice and strategy of inclusion has continued to progress amid the Hellenist Christians.⁴⁵ What appears in Antioch is functioning community; though diverse, it is functioning as a community of Christ followers who are both Jewish and Gentile.⁴⁶ Anderson observes,

When Barnabas came to Antioch and discovered that the church had already assimilated uncircumcised Gentile believers into the community on the evidence that they had received the Holy Spirit, he must have thought, *I’m over my head! I am a pastoral counselor not a theologian!* Indeed, he was given the name Barnabas – which means “son of encouragement” – by the apostles at Jerusalem because he had the gift of empowering and supporting others (Acts 4:36).⁴⁷

Barnabas must have pondered deeply the situation he uncovered in Antioch, what appears to be a flourishing group on non-Jews who had become believers. Certainly he understood the previous events that took place at the Jerusalem council and the implications, but what influences Barnabas’ decision to seek out Saul (Paul) rather than to report back to Jerusalem? There appears to be an underlying tone within the hard line members (Judiazers) of the

⁴² ms44s is a manuscript designation for reference, Wood and Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, 464.

⁴³ Acts 11:19-20

⁴⁴ Acts 11:21-23

⁴⁵ Acts 11:20

⁴⁶ Acts 11:23

⁴⁷ Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches*, 117.

Jerusalem church who are not in agreement with the assimilation of Gentiles. Anderson asserts,

Barnabas was well aware of the fact that the church at Jerusalem was resistant to this accommodation made to Gentile believers. He also knew their theological hermeneutic of the Word of God – the Law of Moses – made it impossible for them to accept the Gentiles if they were to remain faithful to the scriptures as they knew them. Even Peter’s brief foray into Gentile territory was tolerated but certainly not affirmed.⁴⁸

Jerusalem’s tolerance appears to be reflected by the narrative as being falsehearted. Having firsthand experience with the Jerusalem church must have influenced Barnabas’ approach to nurturing the fledgling church in Antioch. Barnabas chooses a course of action that reflects the Positive Deviance Approach through his practices and strategies by recruiting Saul (Paul) from outside the Jerusalem context to engage and nurture the emerging Gentile church in Antioch. Wright concludes from the text, “Unlike the ‘circumcision party’ noted in Acts 11.2, Barnabas seems to have taken what had happened in Caesarea as a firm sign that there was now an open door for non-Jews to be welcomed into full fellowship alongside Jewish believers.”⁴⁹ The implication is that if Barnabas reported back to Jerusalem the outcome would be the mission would have been taken over by the “circumcision party” and sought to produce a clone of the Jerusalem church in Antioch. The practices and strategies employed by Barnabas were to avoid the potential outcome of reproducing the Jerusalem church in Antioch, so he recruited Saul (Paul) to assist him in Antioch.⁵⁰

The strategy of calling Saul (Paul) to come to Antioch was brilliant. Anderson concludes that Barnabas’ strategy was due to Saul’s reputation at this time, “He remembered that Saul (Paul) was in nearby Tarsus. By that time he had become rather well-known, not

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Wright, *Acts for Everyone*, 178–179.

⁵⁰ Acts 11:25-26.

only because of his scholarly study of the Scripture under Gamaliel but more recently due to his zeal for the gospel of Christ in that region (Acts 22:3).”⁵¹ Antioch represents a transition from cloning, which is the practice of a dominate culture being superimposed upon another, resulting in an ecclesial offspring that is identical to the parent. Wright’s assessment of the situation Barnabas finds himself within as “theologically pregnant: he came *and saw the grace of God*.”⁵² Barnabas engages Paul to be part of this transformation.

Barnabas’ practices and strategies imply an intuitive understanding of the situation in Antioch. The Jerusalem church, by seeking to control the spread of the Gospel and contain it within the Judaic cultural form, attempts to produce cultural clones; the offspring reflects the parent identically. The issue with cloning is it focused upon a “one size fits all” mentality of culture. Cloning generates little to no variation and therefore is limited to specific environmental contexts by generating identical replicas.⁵³ Barnabas helps to shield the fledgling community from the Judaic formulation, by asking Paul, who is familiar with Jewish and Gentile contexts, to come and teach, opening the community to formulate a distinct multicultural ecclesia.

Saul (Paul) understands the “Word of God Theology”⁵⁴ position of the Apostles and the circumcision party in Jerusalem, as well as the Pharisaic context of the Judiazers. The recruitment of Paul indicates that something much deeper is at work in Antioch. What

⁵¹ Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches*, 117–118.

⁵² Italics belong to Wright, Wright, *Acts for Everyone*, 178.

⁵³ Pascale et al., *The Power of Positive Deviance*, 187.

⁵⁴ Anderson asserts, “Paul was also familiar with the ‘Word of God theology’ held by the apostles at Jerusalem. His former teacher, Gamaliel, was a member of the council of the Pharisees (Acts 5:34). He was not about to confront his former mentor in the law because, since being his student, Paul had a personal encounter with the risen Messiah and had received direct revelation from him concerning his gospel of grace and freedom from the law. Christ had revealed to Paul that the law achieved its purpose and was no longer binding on either Jew or Gentile. Even as the written Gospels later recorded Jesus’ claim to be the ‘lord . . . of the Sabbath,’ Paul could say that the risen Christ is the ‘lord of the law’ (Mark 2:28; Romans 10:4),” Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches*, 118.

appears with Paul's presence is a movement toward empowering contextualization within a new cultural context of the Gospel. Barnabas and Paul become the Positive Deviant architects of the "Christ Cult" that surfaces in Antioch. Barnabas and Paul follow the way of Jesus by empowering contextualization with theological praxis in the multicultural context of Antioch. Johnson asserts,

Like Jesus, the primitive Christianity of Palestine was thoroughly Jewish, but it was in the Diaspora (specifically Antioch) that Hellenistic Christians created the 'Christ Cult' under the influences of the Mysteries, and this was the Christianity into which Paul was baptized and whose sacramental character he subsequently interpreted theologically.⁵⁵

According to Johnson, Barnabas and Paul engaged an emerging "Christ Cult" and influenced its development by taking a Positive Deviance Approach in relationship to the contextualization of the Gospel amid the Antioch community. By keeping the Jerusalem church at a distance the emerging Gentile ecclesia was able to develop unfettered by the Judaic cultural constants. It was not a matter of the acceptance of the authority of the Apostles and the elders in Jerusalem, this is not implicated by the action of Barnabas and Paul, but it was a matter of contextualization in a Gentile cultural setting. The problem that existed was the inflexible position held by the Jerusalem church, which was that each believer must have an initial conversion to Judaism as proselytes followed by baptism and circumcision. Barnabas and Paul act as a shield due to their backgrounds, understanding and relationship with the Jerusalem church, and this allowed the Antioch ecclesia the opportunity to develop and establish a multicultural context within Christianity.

⁵⁵ The influence of the **Mysteries** in this quote references the presence of the Mystery cults that were prevalent throughout the Roman Empire during the first century, mystery cults such as the Imperial cult of the Roman era, the Persian Mithraic Mysteries, Thracian/Phrygian Sabazius, Egyptian Isis Mysteries cult, Phrygian Cybele, Eleusinian Mysteries, the Dionysian Mysteries, and the Orphic Mysteries, Luke Timothy Johnson, *Among the Gentiles: Greco-Roman Religion and Christianity* (Yale University Press, 2009), 12–13.

Intentional Community

The Antioch community of Christ followers was an intentional community. These types of communities are inherently fragile. Identity is an implicit issue amid the members because they belong by choice and not by birth.⁵⁶ Johnson writes, “Since converts joined the community as adults directly from Jewish and Gentile backgrounds and with already formed religious practices, the problems created were real and difficult.”⁵⁷ The Jerusalem church, a Judaic cultural expression of ecclesia, is an example of incorporating already formed religious practices into the Christ following community. Barnabas and Paul became integrated in this emerging community, “Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for an entire year they met with the church and taught a great many people, and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called ‘Christians.’”⁵⁸ Intuitively, Barnabas and Paul’s practices and strategies in Antioch gave an emerging Gentile church the opportunity to create an identity outside the containment of the Jerusalem (Hebrew/Palestinian) church. The lack of containment allowed for a separate identification of the Antioch ecclesia as the “Christ Cult” demonstrated by the surrounding society naming them “Christians.”⁵⁹

These intuitive practices and strategies of Barnabas and Paul mirror the Positive Deviance Approach.⁶⁰ The following is a brief analysis of the Positive Deviance Approach as demonstrated by Barnabas and Paul in the Antioch context. First, by engaging the culture

⁵⁶ For information on efforts to analyze the growth of Christianity in sociological concepts and terms see Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire: (A.D. 100-400)* (Yale University Press, 1986); Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁵⁷ Johnson, *Among the Gentiles*, 138.

⁵⁸ Acts 11:25-26.

⁵⁹ Acts 11:26.

⁶⁰ Pascale et al., *The Power of Positive Deviance*, 196–198.

from within the culture, Barnabas and Paul become members of the community, they act as sponsors and local leadership from within and not from above or from outside as in cultural imperialism. This gave Barnabas and Paul the ability to have an insider's perspective and understanding of what it meant to be one within the culture and the community. Second, the community navigates creating its own identity as "Christians," meaning Gentile members did not have to proselytize to Judaism by receive circumcision and keeping the Law of Moses. Third, the community designed its own practices. The ecclesia's identity is reflected, identified and confirmed by the greater community surrounding them. Fourth, the community adapts to the internal diversity of both Jewish and Gentile cultures converging and intermingling, thereby creating a distinctive culture of acceptance and inclusion in a multicultural context.

Antioch appears to overcome the intercultural conflict that had been the intractable feature contained within Judaic Christianity represented in Jerusalem. The Christ following community in Antioch had created its own criteria for what it means to be a Christian.

Flemming concludes concerning this emerging multicultural church,

This 'model' community in Luke's story reflects an ethos of innovation, evidenced by several notable characteristics. First, it shows a willingness to embrace uncircumcised non-Jewish converts and, apparently, partake in table fellowship (including the Lord's Supper) across cultural lines. . . . Second, the Syrian community grows out of a mission that preached Jesus as Lord (Acts 11:20). . . . Third, it is at Antioch that followers of the Way are first called 'Christians.' . . . Fourth, under the inspiration of the Spirit, the Antioch fellowship launches the first planned 'overseas' mission to Gentiles as well as Jews (Acts 13:1-3). Finally, the Christians at Antioch maintain an ongoing link to the Jewish Christian mother church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-30; 15:1-35).⁶¹

Antioch represents a major paradigm shift in the narrative of the church from a Jewish centric contained faith to a multicultural faith. The cultural dynamics reflected in the text

⁶¹ Fleming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 43–44.

have significant cultural implication as the Gospel is identified within Gentile society. What is implicit and culturally bound is identified amid the Judaic Christians. The Gentile converts in Antioch are not required to be Jewish proselytes in order to become part of the people of God. The issue of multiculturalism is still reflected in modern society today. Human beings have a predilection for associating with those who hold the same cultural affinities, especially in religious contexts.

Acts 15 – Dissension

Implicitly bound cultural features are important in established communal identities and social control.⁶² Circumcision amid the Hebrews is an example of an implicitly bound cultural feature for the purpose of establishing communal identity. The party of the circumcision amid the Jerusalem Council witnesses how deeply imbedded circumcision was as the main cultural identifier in Judaism. The conflict regarding Gentile conversions comes to the forefront of the Jerusalem Council again due to the issue of the implicitly culturally bound Judaic identity.⁶³ What was thought to have been settled in Acts 10-11 has reared its head again and is brought up for debate amid the Apostles and elders in Jerusalem. Believers who came out of the “sect of the Pharisees” voiced their concern for the ancestral traditions that set them apart. The acceptance of Gentiles without requiring circumcision and adherence to the Law of Moses were part of the qualifiers, essentials of Judaic proselytism. There is a level of sincerity within their concern, but the discernment of the theological trajectory of Gentile inclusion is already in motion. The issue here is much more than just circumcision and adherence to the Law of Moses. It is the issue of national identity that has been part of

⁶² Ferraro, *Cultural Anthropology*, 304–317.

⁶³ Acts 15:1-5.

the struggle for the Jewish nation. N.T. Wright clarifies what the Pharisees intentions comprised during this period,

. . . the agenda of the Pharisees in this period was not simply to do with ‘purity,’ whether their own or other peoples’. All the evidence suggests that at least the majority of the Pharisees . . . had as their main aim that which purity *symbolized*: The political struggle to maintain Jewish identity and to realize the dream of national liberation. . . . The majority of the Pharisees until A.D. 70 were Shammaites, whose legendary strictness in this period was not simply a matter of personal application of purity codes but, as we see in the case of Saul of Tarsus, had to do with a desire to purify, cleanse and defend the nation against paganism.⁶⁴

The positive deviance practices and strategies of going to the Gentiles, though they are thoroughly witnessed and authenticated by the Spirit in Acts 10 – 11, are perceived as deviant by the sect of the Pharisees (Judiazers). According to Wright, it maybe the Pharisees perceived the deviance as deteriorating the Jewish national distinctive and identity. The Jewish narrative relates the struggle to maintain their identity and now it is potentially being diluted through the inclusion of Gentiles without proper proselytism.

As observed earlier in the narrative of Acts, the Apostles and elders in Jerusalem had affirmed the Hellenist Christian mission to Samaria and Antioch in Acts 8:14-17 and 11:22-23. The conflict over the issue of circumcision and adherence to the Law of Moses in Acts 15 suggests the Jerusalem Council was limited in their abilities to give oversight. This is demonstrated in the council’s inability to render sweeping edicts that held sway with the sect of the Pharisees. The Antioch church and the Jerusalem Council are caught in a quandary, Keener writes,

The churches of the Diaspora, like the synagogues, were ruled by local elders, not by a hierarchy in Jerusalem; but just as synagogues respected messengers from the

⁶⁴ N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (InterVarsity Press, 2011), 56.

temple authorities in the homeland, the non-Palestinian churches need to resolve the issues raised by those purporting to speak for Judean Christians.⁶⁵

The sect of the Pharisees assumes that the Gentiles would assimilate into the Judaic national identity as part of Israel by conforming to Judaism. The assumption of the Pharisees represents the expectations of a colonial cultural mode. The expectations are that in order to belong, people must give up their cultural identity for another that is imposed upon them. As demonstrated in the expectation of Gentiles to first proselytes to Judaism in order to become part of the church. Anderson recognized that this thought pattern is revealed in the narrative of Acts 15, he writes,

. . . circumcision represents for them continuity with the Law of Moses. Delegates from the church in Jerusalem were sent to Antioch with the demand ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’ (Acts 15:1). Circumcision, originally given to Abraham as a covenant sign, has now become for the church at Jerusalem the religious equivalent and requirement of the law of Moses.⁶⁶

The narrative of Acts demonstrates a trajectory of deviance from the traditional expectations of Judaic cultural assimilation to a multicultural setting that engages people in their indigenous cultures.

The trajectory in the Acts of the Apostles appears to definitively indicate that the positive deviance approach is congruent with God’s plan as the Gospel is to go to all nations just as Jesus commanded.⁶⁷ This challenges the conventional wisdom and the cultural ideology of assimilation to Judaism. Through the Hellenists positive deviance approach, the Hellenists practices and strategies functioned as a means of empowering contextualization of the Gospel into the Gentile cultural milieu. The Hellenists appear to have followed the

⁶⁵ Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, Ac 15:2.

⁶⁶ Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches*, 203.

⁶⁷ Acts 1:8

descriptive Christology found in the narrative of the Gospels as the driving force of their theological praxis.

Acts 15 demonstrates the effect of the positive deviance approach. The traditional mode of proselytism has been redefined along with what it means to be identified with Jesus Christ. Judaic Christianity as represented in the Jerusalem church irrevocably experienced an upset of its social and cultural equilibrium as the Hellenists moved amid the Gentiles. Johnson and Harrington address how the narrative of Acts 15 established trajectory and expansion of the Gospel with the approval of the Council, “. . . the meeting allows Luke to legitimate in formal fashion the Gentile mission: the human Church now catches up with the divine initiative, and formally declares itself on the side of God’s plan to save all humanity.”⁶⁸ The divine initiative deviated from the constructed path of Judaic culture to include the Gentiles cultures. The development of the Gentile mission came through empowering contextualization with theological praxis.

Johnson and Harrington provide further discussion about the basis of contextualization in the new formulation as found in faith, they assert, “. . . the debate enables Luke to define more precisely the basis for this legitimacy, by establishing *faith* as the basis of salvation (and of inclusion within God’s people) for all, both Gentiles and Jews.”⁶⁹ The effect of the Council is to define clearly that the basis of contextualization is through faith and not conformity to Judaic proselytism. The emergence of faith as the means of contextualization at the council yields an unprecedented opportunity for the forward movement of the Gospel amid the Gentile nations as God’s initiative.

⁶⁸ Johnson and Harrington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 268.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

The initiative of God directly deviates from the traditional identification with Israel through proselytism, instead Christian converts maintain their own cultural identities thereby increasing Israel's identification. Contextualization is legitimized by the Jerusalem Council and which also recognized the theological praxis of the Hellenists as deviant to Judaism, but in sync with what God was doing, with God's initiative. Johnson and Harrington write,

. . . the discussion provides the opportunity to emphasize the essential *continuity* between these stages in the divine plan: the inclusion of the Gentiles does not mean the replacement of 'Israel' but its expansion; the elimination of Mosaic *ethos* (custom) for the Gentiles does not mean the elimination of Torah, but rather the fulfillment of its prophetic intention, 'made known long ago' (15:18), as well as the continuation of those aspects of Torah that have always applied to the proselyte and sojourner.⁷⁰

The outcome of Jerusalem Council creates an uneasy atmosphere of multiculturalism. The position of the Pharisees failed due to its own success of separating themselves from the milieu of Gentile culture. Their success was in maintaining a clear demarcation of the identity of Israel through circumcision and the Law of Moses, but their zeal for the semiotics of Judaism and their organization as a sect created an inflexible position stalling the advance of the Gospel. The Council's decision that they "should not trouble the Gentiles who are turning to God"⁷¹ indicates there would not be a need to conform to Judaic traditions such as circumcision and keeping the Law of Moses. The essential requirements given by the council, "abstaining from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood."⁷² These essentials reflect the expectations of proselytes

⁷⁰ Johnson and Harrington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Acts 15:1-21.

⁷¹ Acts 15:19.

⁷² Acts 15:20.

and sojourners in Judaic culture and are offered by the council as the standard of representing the New Covenant Israel.

The council's decision demonstrates that what could not be accomplished from a hierarchical top down system had been accomplished through an intuitive Positive Deviance Approach from within the community of faith. By means of contextualization through a theological praxis based in the descriptive Christology found in narrative of the Gospels, the Hellenists practices and strategies achieve what would otherwise have been unthinkable, a Gentile ecclesia.

Conclusion

In the narrative of Acts the dramatization plays out the full consequences of Jesus' deviance as demonstrated in the Gospels. The innovation of Jesus as the fount of deviance in relationship to the traditions and conventional wisdom is an inescapable feature of the forward movement of the Hellenists in engaging Gentile culture. This feature mobilized the Hellenistic members of the church to search for and engage the variances or deviant practices and strategies in their midst. The descriptive Christology inspired the theological praxis that led to the contextualization of the Gospel amid the Gentiles. This led to the inevitable emergence of the multicultural church and trajectory that brought about the Gospels' expansion into the Gentile world as witnessed in Acts.

The conclusion of the Jerusalem Council was that the Gentiles are welcome just as they are, on the same basis of faith in Jesus and God's grace. The implication is that the modernist contemporary and institutional church in America should not expect marginalized people to conform to their cultural identification, but should adhere to and agree with the

Jerusalem Council's edict. Contextualization amid mainstream society is widely demonstrated through the use of popular music and leadership techniques, but contextualization amid the toughest segment of society demonstrate a need for an empowered theological praxis as demonstrated in the New Testament by Jesus Christ and the Hellenists.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL PRAXIS

*“If you know me, you will know my Father also.
From now on you do know him and have seen him.”*
--Jesus¹

In the book, *The Tangible Kingdom*, Hugh Halter tells the story of entering into a rustic old Irish pub. It would be a life changing experience for him, not that going to a pub was anything unusual or special for him, but at this pub he would engage a group of non-Christian and mostly unchurched people who would honestly and openly converse with him about the meaning of life.² Hugh has learned to enter into a practice of deviance from the norms of his ecclesial cultural group, a Holiness Pentecostal Christian sect that in the past has deeply frowned upon entering pubs, in order to connect with people outside the church. Hugh unknowingly developed as a practitioner of the Positive Deviance Approach. He would refer to himself as a missional, relational and incarnational Christ follower. In other words, his practices and strategies were outside the conventional norms of his tribe.

By means of engaging people outside of what may be considered an acceptable context by the church, at least by Hugh’s tribe, Hugh would connect with people and bring about the acceptable goals of reaching people for Christ. This section of the paper shows that there exists a theological praxis for Positive Deviance. The question is whether the Positive Deviance Approach functions in the ecclesial contexts. If so, then a further question is whether a theological basis exists for praxis as exemplified by Jesus Christ and the early church. The goal of this section is to an open discussion concerning how the Positive

¹ John 14:7

² Halter and Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom*. 9.

Deviance Approach, when applied to ecclesial contexts is able to create and sustain ecclesia amid marginalized people.

Deviance, defined in the Merriam-Webster dictionary is “deviating from an accepted norm.”³ The word itself, deviance, conjures up negative images, but what if deviance is not always negative? This is the basic question and driving force behind the conceptual ideology and development of Positive Deviance studies.⁴ Positive Deviance is a relatively new area of study in the field of sociology and anthropology. Gretchen M. Spreitzer and Scott Sonenshein in the article *Toward the Construct Definition of Positive Deviance*, in the *American Behavioral Scientist* work toward a definition of Positive Deviance. A summary of their definition of Positive Deviance is this: an individual or group approach to sociological and anthropological shifts based on the concept every community performs similar functions and actions, but within the community are certain individual or small groups that function as positive deviants. The positive deviants exhibit unique practices and strategies, honorable behavior outside the social norms, which enables them to be more effective than their counterparts with the same resources, environment and sociological construct.⁵

Positive Deviance

The emergence of the sociological concept of Positive Deviance was brought forward through the observations of Harvard nutritionist Dr. D. Mark Hegsted. In 1967 he recorded his observations in the area of child malnutrition. He asserts, “We should pay a great deal

³ Deviance, (2009) In *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, Retrieved December 11, 2009, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/deviant>.

⁴ Gretchen M. Spreitzer and Scott Sonenshein, “Toward the Construct Definition of Positive Deviance,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 47, no. 6 (February 1, 2004): 828–847.

⁵ Ibid.

more attention to those individuals who are apparently healthy while consuming diets which seem to us to be restricted. We should pay more attention to the reasons for nutritional success rather than nutrition failure.”⁶ Hegsted’s observations laid the foundation for rethinking the concept of deviance. In the arena of child nutrition, Hegsted recognized the sociological implications were found in the practices and strategies of deviants, those producing exceptional results in a limited resource environment. Hegsted recognized that deviance is a necessary component of societal development. Without such deviance there would be a stagnation of societal evolution.

According to sociologists Sullivan and Thompson assert that relativity is the best sociological approach to evaluate the necessity and evolution of society through deviance.

They write,

A key element of the sociological approach to deviance is that it is a function of the judgments of particular groups. Behaviors and characteristics are deviant *because they are so defined by a particular group*.

Some people approach deviance in an *absolute* way, judging certain behaviors and characteristics to be good or bad and right or wrong by comparing them to some fixed standards. Religious views of deviance, for example, often reflect this approach, with some divinely revealed truths representing the “standard.” Others adopt a *statistical* view of deviance: deviance involves a departure from an established average.

There is considerable variation from one group to another in what is considered deviant . . . definitions of deviance also vary from one situation to another.

To explain this variety, sociologists maintain that deviance is *relative*, or based on the social definitions of some group.⁷

Deviance is generally accepted as a violation of social norms but it does not need to be perceived as negative according to Hegsted, Sullivan and Thompson. In many instances it is

⁶ Marian F. Zeitlin et al., *Positive deviance in child nutrition* (United Nations University, 1990).

⁷ Sullivan and Thompson, *Sociology—Concepts*, 144.

the vehicle for positive social changes. The sociological basis for the Positive Deviance Approach is found in the premise that “. . . deviance is complex, and many people find it hard to understand . . . it may be one of the more difficult forms of human behavior for people to comprehend, and people are often tempted to settle for overly simple explanations.”⁸

Sullivan and Thomas’ observation indicates that human nature seeks to establish a status quo, but in the consideration of sociological constructs, relativity must be considered or factored into any analysis of deviant behaviors in any given context. The issue of a pluralistic society adds to the complexity of any deviant behavioral analysis as part of social development and change.

Positive Deviance as a Basis for Social Change

Concerning the sociological basis of Positive Deviance, Sullivan and Thompson refer to Robert K. Merton’s profound conceptual ideology that approaches deviance from a functionalist perspective. Merton’s approach indicates that the functionality of deviance is the basis for social change, he writes, “. . . people in our society are taught to strive for certain goals but are not always provided with the culturally approved means necessary to attain these goals.”⁹ Merton described such inconsistencies and the misunderstanding from perplexing situations as creating in people what he refers to as “anomie.”¹⁰ Anomie, according to Emile Durkheim, a noted expert on sociological constructs, “. . . is a social condition in which social norms are weak, contradictory, or change so rapidly that they

⁸ Ibid, 146.

⁹ Thomas J. Sullivan, *Sociology: Concepts and Applications in a Diverse World* (Pearson/Allyn and Bacon, 2007), 135.

¹⁰ Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Free Press, 1968), 42.

provide little guidance for behavior.”¹¹ An example of anomie is the American cultural goal of success defined largely as material possessions driven by a consumerist society.

In order to deal with social inequities individuals or groups resort to deviant behavior in order attain the socially accepted goals. Merton describes five modes of adaptation to anomie as a social condition. The first mode is *conformity*: This mode provides for a stable society where participants accept approved goals and approved means. The second is *innovation*: participants accept approved goals, but pursue those goals through other means. The third is *ritualism*: participants accept means to achieve goals, but compulsively reject the accepted goals. The fourth is *retreatism*: participants do not accept either the goals or the means of a society, but drops out of the social context completely. The fifth is *rebellion*: participants reject the goals and means striving to replace the accepted ones a new set of goals and means.¹² These modes constitute the functionality of deviance in the social construct of any given group. The following table illustrates the modes of individual adaptation to anomie according to Merton.

Modes of Adaptation to Anomie

	Accepts Culturally Approved goals	Accepts Culturally Approved means
1. Conformity	+	+
2. Innovation	+	-
3. Ritualism	-	+
4. Retreatism	-	-
5. Rebellion	±	±

¹¹ Émile Durkheim, Carol Cosman, and Mark Sydney Cladis, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 19.

¹² Merton, 193-209.

- + signifies acceptance
- signifies rejection
- ± signifies rejection of prevailing goals and means and the substitution of new goals and means.¹³
- * *The Positive Deviance Approach functions mainly with in the second category of innovation.*

Merton's analysis indicates that a sociological basis for Positive Deviance is culturally oriented and comes from within the various modes of anomie. The Positive Deviance Approach functions mainly with in the second category of innovation. As cultural participants deal with the challenge of changing social norms, they require the presence of Positive Deviance practitioners. Sullivan and Thompson reinforce this perspective. They assert, "Deviance can have destructive consequences, but some forms of deviance can actually contribute to the maintenance of society."¹⁴ Sullivan discusses Durkheim, who examines the influences of deviance as part of the maintenance of society. Sullivan notes Durkheim's premise is that deviance is a normal and necessary part of the social construct of all societies. Concerning the creation of social mores, he writes,

. . . the punishment of deviance is a collective reaffirmation of those values that the deviant has violated, and this enhances group solidarity. . . deviance can act as a warning signal that there is a serious inconsistency or defect in society. . . deviance can act as a safety valve to prevent social discontent from being directed at basic societal values and institutions. . . deviance can contribute to social change. In short, what is deviant and stigmatized in one era may become normal in another era.¹⁵

Durkheim's analysis of deviance helps establish the credibility of the Positive Deviance Approach. According to Durkheim's conclusion it may be presumed that Positive Deviance is a perpetual presence in human society bringing about change to social norms and

¹³ * Italics are mine for the purpose of indicating where the Positive Deviance Approach would operate, Source: Adapted from Merton, 150.

¹⁴ Sullivan, *Sociology--Concepts, Issues, and Applications*, 161.

¹⁵ Sullivan, *Sociology: Concepts and Applications in a Diverse World*, (Pearson/Allyn and Bacon, 2007), 147.

construct. The logical question is how does the concept of Positive Deviance apply in an ecclesial context? Since deviance is based in practices and strategies the logical examination in an ecclesial context would be to understand a theological basis and praxis of Positive Deviance.

Praxis of the Positive Deviance Approach

In 1990 Dr. Jerry Sternin and his wife Monique developed from an ideological concept of Positive Deviance as a practical theory they dubbed “amplifying positive deviance.”¹⁶ It is from their *amplifying positive deviance* that the praxis of positive deviance is derived. During the 1990’s the Sternin’s were working as staff members for Save the Children. Their job was to create an operational branch of Save the Children in Vietnam at the request of the Vietnamese government in order to help deal with childhood malnutrition. In Vietnam they developed eight practices and strategies of applying the Positive Deviance praxis in the area of child malnutrition. It is my thesis that these same Positive Deviant practices and strategies are translatable to the ecclesial context.

In the December 19, 2007 magazine *Fast Company*, David Dorsey interviewed Dr. Jerry and Monique Sternin concerning their theory of “amplifying positive deviance.” The following is a summarization of the eight practices and strategies of Positive Deviance. The eight practices and strategies form the foundation of the praxis of Positive Deviance. The practices and strategies are each delineated as steps:

¹⁶ D. Dorsey, “Positive deviant,” *Fast Company* 41 (2000) 284–292.

“Step one: Don’t presume that you have the answer.”¹⁷ There were no preconceived solutions or answers. When the Sternin’s embarked upon this experience they were open to the culture and not imposing their culture upon another. This removes the assumption of cultural superiority (cultural imperialism) from the environment. The only assumption is that the answers they sought would come from within the culture itself. The Sternin’s sought to “identify the positive deviants within” the culture itself.¹⁸

“Step two: Don’t think of it as a dinner party.”¹⁹ The approach taken was a grass roots level endeavor. It was not an over the top coming in and trying to impose ideas or methods from outside through a combined effort of teams, educating from another cultural perspective, but instead focuses upon the resources available within the culture itself. Group identification and cohesion must be from the tribal level maintaining the cultural identity as homogeneous.²⁰

“Step Three: Let them do it themselves.”²¹ The idea behind this step is to allow for the discovery factor to work into the culture of the community without upsetting the cultural equilibrium. This allows the community to take ownership of the practices and strategies. Therefore the practices and strategies become their own due to the perspective that they were sourced from within themselves. Sternin says, “Raise questions, but let the group come up with the answers on its own.”²²

¹⁷ Ibid, 285.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid, 286.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

“Step four: Identify conventional wisdom.”²³ In order to identify positive deviants the conventional wisdom, the culturally accepted practices and strategies, of any given group must be understood. Understanding and identifying with a culture helps outsiders to grasp what it means to be one of the tribe. This allows for differentiation of positive deviants to be established easier. The premise is that the conventional wisdom of any given group identifies the limiting factors of the group. Identifying the positive deviants becomes possible through examining practices and strategies that go against conventional wisdom, but bring about superior conditions. The premise identifies conventional wisdom as source of stagnation within a community or culture and maybe a contributor to the negative results within a culture or society.²⁴ The premise reflects Durkheim’s “. . . deviance can contribute to social change. In short, what is deviant and stigmatized in one era may become normal in another era.”²⁵ The implication is deviance can act as a positive change agent within human culture and society.

“Step Five: Identify and analyze the deviants.”²⁶ This step involves identifying the various practices and strategies that emerge within the cultural group. This naturally leads to the positive deviants’ identification. In order to qualify as a positive deviant the practices and strategies of the deviant must be recognized as honorable and caring even when conventional wisdom would prohibit such activities.²⁷ This is a critical indicator of a cultures’ compassion toward the marginalized of the society. If members are willing to engage in practices and

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid, 287.

²⁵ Sullivan, 147.

²⁶ Dorsey, 288.

²⁷ Ibid.

strategies that are not accepted, but care for the weak, poor and otherwise invisible population it is considered positive deviance.

“Step Six: Let deviants adopt deviations of their own.”²⁸ This is critical according to Sternin. Positive Deviance is about learning new practices and strategies. In order to maximize adherence to positive deviant behavior it must be discovered within the group in order for the practices and strategies to be effective and transferable creating new sociological norms. Sternin says, “It’s not a transfer of knowledge. It’s not about importing best practices from somewhere else. It’s about changing behavior. . . . You enable people to practice a new behavior, not to sit in a class learning about it.”²⁹ The implication being that it is easier to behave oneself into change than to think oneself into change.

“Step Seven: Track results and publicize them.”³⁰ Sternin’s premise for taking this action is to allow an opportunity to break the hold of conventional wisdom in the group. Sternin suggests that this is how a culture of change is developed from within a culture. Dorsey summarizes Sternin’s seventh step, he writes, “. . . tracking the results quantitatively to show how positive deviance works. Chips away at conventional wisdom, and gradually alter low expectations by showing, in indisputable terms, the results that come with doing things differently.”³¹ Change does not come easy, but it is possible if continuity is maintained with the practices and strategies.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 289.

³¹ Ibid., 290.

“Step Eight: Repeat steps one through seven.”³² Not everyone buys in initially, but the persistence of using behavioral modification through exceptional results viewed within a specific culture or context allows for greater buy in with each cycle. Stakeholders become willing to release their entrenched positions as the benefits of the new practices and strategies are demonstrated. Sternin says, “Make the whole process cyclical. Once people discover effective ways to deviate from the norm and once those methods have become common practice, it’s time to do another study to find out how the best performers in the group are operating now.”³³

Through the delineation of these practices and strategies exemplified through Sternin’s work with Save the Children, the study of Positive Deviance has spread beyond child nutrition to the areas of medicine and business. Positive Deviance is also unintentionally receiving application in the practices and strategies of ecclesial context operating at the margins of culture in Portland, Oregon. This raises questions about identifying positive deviance in cultural contexts. Identifying positive deviants may best be accomplished through an understanding of the semiotics, reading the signs within the culture that reveal the practices and strategies of the deviants.

Semiotics and Positive Deviance

Semiotics is an important aspect of everyday life, though most people do not realize it. According to Merriam-Webster, Semiotics is “a general philosophical theory of signs and symbols that deals especially with their function in both artificially constructed and natural

³² Ibid., 289.

³³ Ibid.

languages and comprises syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics.”³⁴ It involves every aspect of human communication. At the best of times communications are difficult, Hall writes, “One problem of semiotics is that the message that arrives at the destination is not always the same one that has been sent.”³⁵ Semiotics is critical in the understanding of Positive Deviance. The reading and interpreting of practices and strategies or signs as Daniel Chandler would insist may help communicate deviant activities. Concerning the ability to interpret deviant semiotics on an individual level Chandler refers to semioticians, Lakoff and Johnson’s conclusions. He asserts,

They argue that (as with metaphor) metonymic substitution may influence our thoughts, attitudes and actions by focusing on certain aspects of a concept and suppressing other aspects which are inconsistent with the metonym When we think of *Picasso*, we are not just thinking of a work art alone, in and of itself. We think of it in terms of its relation to the artist, this is, his conception of art, his technique, his role in art history, etc." I wonder if their "etc." would include his ear! Just by mentioning, *Picasso*, many aspects of his art and his personal story come to mind, but it may not be the same thought.³⁶

Semiotics in relationship to the Positive Deviance Approach is similar to beauty in the eye of the beholder. What is beautiful to one person is not necessarily beautiful to another, so semiotics is the art of interpretation of signs and symbols. Identifying Positive Deviance practitioners requires the ability to observe even the slightest variances in practices and strategies. The importance of semiotics in the Positive Deviance Approach is the ability to identify the practitioners of positive deviance through the nuances amid their practices.

³⁴ Semiotics. (2009). In *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*. Retrieved December 14, 2009, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Semiotics>.

³⁵ Sean Hall, *This Means This, This Means That: A User’s Guide to Semiotics* (London: L. King Pub., 2007). 32.

³⁶ Metonymic substitution is a figure of speech consisting of the use of the name of one thing for that of another of which it is an attribute or with which it is associated (as “crown” in “lands belonging to the crown”) Merriam-Webster; Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics*, 2nd ed. (London ;;New York: Routledge, 2007).

The ability to discern the difference between the conventional wisdom of a group and the positive deviance practices and strategies is crucial to determining viable solutions amid the group.

The signs of positive deviant practices and strategies in a cultural setting may not always be obvious. Dr. William Seidman and Michael McCauley assert, “Most people think of a deviant as someone who does bad things . . . there are also *positive deviants* . . . positive deviants transcend the conventional wisdoms, discovering new and innovative ways to function without creating conflict.”³⁷ The semiotics of the Positive Deviance Approach is revealed by extraordinary results. Dr. Sternin views positive deviants as people who are willing to work outside of conventional wisdom and use unconventional means to obtain the culturally accepted goals. Concerning Dr. Sternin’s observations about the semiotics of Positive Deviance, he writes, “Half out of desperation, half in inspiration . . . there are individuals whose exceptional behavior or practices enable them to get better results than their neighbors with the same exact resources.”³⁸

The semiotics of the Positive Deviance Approach appears as a willingness not to be limited by the conventional wisdom of a context or cultural group. This willingness usually is not seen as creating conflict in a cultural setting though it might be viewed with skepticism or with cultural ambivalence. The practitioner’s approach is self initiative and innovation as practices and strategies that lead to a change in behavior. The behavioral changes result in the accepted goal of the culture.

³⁷ William Seidman and Michael McCauley, “Positive Deviants Rule,” <http://www.cerebyte.biz/articles/PositiveDeviantsRule.pdf> (accessed December 15, 2009)

³⁸ Dorsey, 285.

The Ecclesial Context

The general ecclesial context of the church in western cultures is found in modernity. The shift to postmodernism has led to an increased non-relevance to the cultural context the church resides within. The delineation of the Positive Deviance Approach as progressive force in culture indicates the necessity for developing a system comparable to Dr. Sternin's "*amplifying positive deviance*" for use within the ecclesial context. Dr. Lesslie Newbigin makes a statement in his book *Foolishness to the Greeks* that sums up the necessity for developing an ecclesial concept of Positive Deviance, he writes,

The idea that one can or could at any time separate out by some process of distillation a pure gospel unadulterated by any cultural accretion is an illusion. It is, in fact, an abandonment of the gospel, for the gospel is about the word made flesh. Every statement of the gospel in words is conditioned by the culture of which those words are a part, and every style of life that claims to embody the truth of the gospel is a culturally conditioned style of life. There can never be a culture-free gospel. Yet the gospel, which is from the beginning to the end embodied in culturally conditioned forms, calls into question all cultures, including the one in which it was originally embodied.³⁹

Newbigin's conclusion indicates that culture is always an influence in the embodiment of the Gospel. This implies that in order for the Gospel to be effective it must engage and challenge all cultures as God seeks to bring forth the Kingdom. This implicates the gap that exists between the traditional church and the emerging churches amid the marginalized. Leonard Sweet, in his endorsement of Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch's book, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century Church*, writes,

The current credibility gap has made it hard to communicate the gospel with clarity and authenticity. Paradoxically, this is the case even though it is currently a time of almost unprecedented openness to the issues of God, faith, and meaning. This is a time when the need for, and relevance of, the gospel has seldom been greater, but the relevance of the Church has seldom been less.⁴⁰

³⁹ Newbigin, *Foolishness to The Greeks*. 4.

⁴⁰ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, cover.

Challenging traditional expressions of ecclesiology is not new to Christianity, though it may not be well known, Jesus Christ himself established the precedent through his interactions with the religious ruling class of his time. Blomberg tells us in his book *Contagious Holiness* that Jesus' meals with sinners' sets forth a theory of Jesus challenging the traditional forms of ecclesia exercised within first century Palestine. He writes, ". . . Jesus demonstrated his acceptance of them *without* calling them to repentance."⁴¹ Blomberg develops the cultural and religious context of the narrative. The narrative reflects the culture is unfriendly to Jesus' practices and strategies of openly engaging sinners in this manner. He writes,

. . . what stood out was Jesus' pronouncement of God's forgiveness of sin to people without requiring of them the standard Jewish signs of true repentance: the offering of animal sacrifices in the temple; restitution where crimes, particularly financial ones, against people could be compensated for; and for a period of penance or probation during which ones change of heart and behavior could be tested.⁴²

The practices and strategies of Jesus are in direct conflict with the ecclesia and conventional wisdom of his time. Blomberg makes this observation concerning Jesus' practices and strategies in comparison with the actions of the religious populace. He writes,

In fact, the overall impression emerging from the majority of the texts surveyed . . . is that meals helped to draw boundaries. Only those who in some sense belonged were included; the total outsider was not welcome. We do not find a single example of . . . faithful Israelites taking the initiative to seek out the ritually or morally stigmatized of their society for inclusion in table fellowship, as would later characterize Jesus' practice.⁴³

There exists a clear likeness between the Attractional, Propositional and Colonial ecclesial form represented in the modernist institutional church and the religious leaders of Jesus' time. The difference is those who are challenging the ecclesial model of Attractional,

⁴¹ Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness*, 25.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid, 64.

Propositional and Colonial are approaching ecclesiology from a Jesus way which engages culture from a Missional, Relational and Incarnational form. Sweet gives a fuller description in his book *So Beautiful* when he writes, “Christianity is about a design for living as authentic human beings: a trialectical process of missionalizing, relationalizing, and incarnationalizing your life and community.”⁴⁴ Jesus said, “Follow me.”⁴⁵ By becoming a missional movement the church moves from the institution and becomes the community incarnating Christ to the world thereby breaking the barrier between sacred and secular.

Every area of life becomes sacred. Sweets asserts, “We are not here to keep polity or even to keep our denominational ‘t’ crossed and the ‘i’ dotted. We were put here for more than keeping principles or following commandments. We were put here to 'glorify God and enjoy him forever.’”⁴⁶ Darrell Guder states the challenge “is to move from a church with mission to a missional church.”⁴⁷ Sweet and Guder’s statements inform Christ followers that the church is the mission of the *missio Dei*.⁴⁸ Church as mission requires rethinking the churches practices and strategies, of who the church is and what the church is doing. This requires moving away from the institutional perspective of the church to new forms of ecclesia. This is absolutely necessary in the church-as-mission perspective. This is why a semiotic rubric of ecclesia needs to be developed for the missional church within the

⁴⁴ Sweet, *So Beautiful*, 28.

⁴⁵ John 1:43.

⁴⁶ Sweet, 111.

⁴⁷ Darrell L. Guder and Lois Barrett, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 11.

⁴⁸ David Bosch Helps to define the ideology of the *missio Dei*, “Mission was understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It was thus put in the context of the doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another “movement”: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world. As far as missionary thinking was concerned, this linking with the doctrine of the Trinity constituted an important innovation.” David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Orbis Books, 1998), 390.

construct of the *missio Dei*.

Theological Praxis

The ontology of the Positive Deviance Approach suggests it is relevant to ecclesiological forms and contexts for the 21st century and beyond. Here the question must be asked if there is any theological premise for the praxis of the Positive Deviance Approach in the ecclesial context. The ontological nature of Positive Deviance develops naturally out of the theology of the *missio Dei*, the mission of God. The theological basis of the *missio Dei* is defined by the initiative and innovation of God. God is a missionary. The practices and strategies as represented in the *missio Dei*, suggest the *missio Dei* is the life giving source for the meaning and purpose of the church, Van Sanders writes,

When kept in the context of the Scriptures, *missio Dei* correctly emphasizes that God is the initiator of His mission to redeem through the Church a special people for Himself from all of the peoples (*τα εθνη*) of the world. He sent His Son for this purpose and He sends the Church into the world with the message of the gospel for the same purpose. The perspective of *missio Dei* as the deriving source of the meaning and purpose of the church flows out of the nature of God.⁴⁹

The initiative for the missional movement comes from God, embodied in Jesus Christ and passed onto the church through the empowering of the Holy Spirit. The church is therefore an incarnational community of Christ-followers participating in the missional endeavor as part of God's design. The practices and strategies of the church in mission reflect the same practices and strategies of the Positive Deviance Approach. John Hoffmeyer, associate Professor of Systematic Theology, writes,

In the course of the twentieth century, missiology increasingly made *missio Dei* its foundational term. According to this development, "mission" is not just something

⁴⁹ Van Sanders, "The Mission of God and the Local Church," John M. Bailey, *Pursuing the Mission or God in Church Planting* (North American Mission Board, SBC, 2006), 24.

the church does; mission is God's own activity. The mission of the church is properly understood as participation in God's mission.⁵⁰

The theological basis of the Positive Deviance approach as praxis is found within the doctrine of *missio Dei*. David J. Bosch writes that the initiative and innovation of the Trinity is witnessed in the *missio Dei*,

During the past half a century or so there has been a subtle but nevertheless decisive shift toward understanding mission as God's mission. . . . Mission was understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It was thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classical doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another "movement": The Father, Son and the Holy Spirit sending the church into the world. As far as missionary thinking was concerned, this linking with the doctrine of the Trinity constituted an important innovation Our mission has not life of its own: only in the hands of the sending God can it truly be called mission. Not least since the missionary initiative comes from God alone . . . Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission. There is church because there is mission, not vice versa. To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love.⁵¹

Bosch collectively engages the Trinity within the initiative and innovation of God in the doctrine of the *missio Dei*. This shows the initiative and innovation within the relationship of the Trinity reflects what may be considered the Positive Deviance Approach. Innovation is part of Merton's analysis of the modes of anomie and here show a reflection the work of the Trinity through the incarnation. Specifically, Merton's conclusion demonstrates that innovation is congruent with the theological praxis of the *missio Dei*. Merton's mode of *innovation* is defined as: participants accept approved goals, but pursue those goals through other means.⁵² Innovation plays a major role in the Positive Deviance Approach. The

⁵⁰ John F. Hoffmeyer, "The Missional Trinity," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 40, no. 2 (June 2001): 108.

⁵¹ Bosch, 390

⁵² Merton, 193-209.

practices and strategies of Positive Deviants are not limited by culturally imposed norms. Some may argue there is no room for innovation within the nature of an immutable God because innovation would require change in the character of God. The initiative of God by means of the incarnation provides room to consider the possibility of the openness of God in relationship with his creation. The implication is that the incarnation is the ultimate divine expression of the Positive Deviance Approach.

Considering the implication of the incarnation as the ultimate divine expression of the Positive Deviance Approach, out of the semiotics of Positive Deviance emerges a Christological question that is embedded in the practices and strategies of Jesus. The question challenges the prevailing Christological method which is firmly placed within a modernist analytical methodology as propositional theology. Anderson writes, “. . . it would be fair to say that there is no formal Christology in the New Testament, though there are Christological statements.”⁵³ Anderson goes on to write, “. . . the Christology of the New Testament is descriptive rather than analytical; it is embedded in narrative and proclamation rather than codified in creedal formulas.”⁵⁴ The conclusion is Jesus, by means of the incarnation, determines all Christology as described in the narrative of the New Testament. Flemming writes,

The incarnation of Jesus serves as a key paradigm for a contextualized mission and theology. The New Testament declares that the eternal Word of God was enfleshed in Jesus of Nazareth (Jn1:14). Through his incarnation, Jesus explained or ‘exegeted’ (*exēgēsato*) the Father to us. . . . he embraced the human context in all of its ‘scandalous particularities.’⁵⁵

⁵³ Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches*, 44; C. Norman Kraus, *Jesus Christ Our Lord: Christology from a Disciple’s Perspective* (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004), 82.

⁵⁴ Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches*, 44.

⁵⁵ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 20.

The Christology of the New Testament presents Jesus' practices and strategies were inherently revealed within the Positive Deviance Approach. This may be a bit repetitive, but reflection upon the incarnation is critical to theological praxis. As the enfleshed Word of God Jesus fully identified with humanity and specifically within Judaic society. Flemming writes, "He was thoroughly immersed in his Jewish culture; He participated in its celebrations and traditions; he spoke Aramaic with a Galilean accent; he had distinctive physical features and personality traits."⁵⁶ The event of Jesus' incarnation reflects the Positive Deviance Approach of changing culture from within the culture. Flemming asserts, "Jesus became one with the weak and the marginalized of his society. As a humble village artisan from Galilee, he lived outside the mainstream of religious, administrative and economic power."⁵⁷ Charles and Marguerite Kraft perceive the incarnation as complete in every respect. They write, "God in Jesus became so much a part of a specific human context that many never even recognized that he had come from somewhere else."⁵⁸ Missiologist C. Rene Padilla states it clearly, "It may be said that God has contextualized himself in Jesus Christ."⁵⁹ The Christology of the New Testament is grounded in God's practice and strategy of identifying with humanity in the incarnation.

Jesus' theology of praxis was context-specific. Flemming writes, "The incarnation of Jesus makes contextualization not just a possibility but an obligation. It establishes a

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 20–21.

⁵⁸ Charles H. Kraft and Marguerite G. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross Cultural Perspective* (Orbis Books, 2005), 175.

⁵⁹ C. René Padilla, *Mission Between The Times: Essays On The Kingdom* (W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1985), 83.

paradigm for mediating God's redeeming presence in the world today."⁶⁰ Flemming continues and makes an important observation that confirms the praxis of Positive Deviance in the incarnation of changing culture from within the culture. He writes, "Jesus' incarnation, then, in its fullest dimensions points the way to both a radical identification with each culture in all of its specificity and at the same time to a conversion of cultures from within."⁶¹ Here the *how* of the praxis is revealed as not just an outsider adaptation to a culture through observing *what* is evident in a culture. Identification is the embodiment of the incarnation.

To this point this paper has attempted to show the existence and basis of a theology for the praxis of Positive Deviance as demonstrated in the practices and strategies of Jesus, the early church and the descriptive Christology of the narrative in the New Testament. Though the Positive Deviance Approach appears simplistic, it is in actuality very complex. What emerges from the gathered material points toward a theological praxis of Positive Deviance in relationship to the initiative of God in the work of Jesus Christ and the church. The original initiator and practitioner of Positive Deviance are indicated as God in the practices and strategies of the Trinity in rendering the holistic redemption of humanity.

Jesus' deviant practices and strategies engaged the ethnocentrism that was created from the marginalization within the Judaic culture. Through his practices and strategies Jesus offered a counter-intuitive agenda for the kingdom of God. Wright in his own words comments on Jesus' agenda,

He was telling his hearers to give up their agendas and to trust him for his way of being Israel, his way of bringing the kingdom, his kingdom agenda. . . . Jesus was offering a counter agenda an utterly risky way of being Israel, the way of turning the other cheek and going the second mile, the way of losing your life to gain it. This was

⁶⁰ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 21.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 22–23.

the kingdom-invitation he was issuing.⁶²

The practices and strategies of Jesus are the basis for the theological praxis of the Positive Deviance Approach as witnessed in the New Testament. Jesus as the initiator and prototype of the new kingdom's practices and strategies led to Jesus' practices and strategies becoming the praxis of the early church. The trajectory of the Positive Deviance practices and strategies of Jesus were engaged in the background of the early church that eventually led to the communities' adoption of the radical kingdom of God as Jesus initiated it. The approach to solving the deep seated issue of the ethnocentrism of Judaism became a community driven practice and strategy that resulted in the inclusion of the Hellenists and eventually the Gentiles, thereby, moving the church into a truly multicultural community. The problem solving engaged by the early church reflects the initiative of God directed by the Holy Spirit and seen in the theological trajectory within the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles. These activities reflect the Positive Deviance Approach.

Conclusion

The results were that the early Christian church and community were successful in the adoption of the practices and strategies of Jesus as a Positive Deviance force, setting the church on a theological trajectory for cultural contextualization. The results produce a better understanding of the history and doctrine of the *missio Dei*. The theological trajectory has implications of morphing the *missio Dei* into the mission of Christ, the *missio Christi*, and church as mission. The *missio Christi* maybe best described as the history and doctrine of the mission of Jesus Christ engaged throughout the history of the church and in contemporary

⁶² Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus*, 44.

times. The ideology of the *missio Christi* focuses upon the mission of Jesus Christ of Nazareth as always contemporarily present throughout the whole of the narrative of both the Hebrew and Christian Testaments and church history. The emphasis is upon the active presence of Christ within the church and in pagan cultures and societies, the ubiquity of Christ as the second person of the Trinity. The theological praxis of Positive Deviance is reflected in the words of Flemming, he writes, “Through the presence of the Spirit and the ministry of the church, Christ must be enfleshed in every contemporary human culture and context. To be true to the nature of the gospel itself, we must enable it ‘to enter the blood stream of the people.’”⁶³ The theology and praxis of Positive Deviance is sourced from the life giving blood of a living and risen Jesus, the Christ, and transfused into “the blood stream of people.”

In conclusion, the theological praxis of the Positive Deviance Approach presents a paradigm shift for the modernist institutional church in order to reach the marginalized within their respective cultures. The efforts of Positive Deviants in cultural contexts provide the best opportunity to connect with a broader pluralistic society such as exists in Portland, Oregon. It is important to remember that Positive Deviance according to the definition is delineated as a functional approach to *define, determine, discover* and *design* an appropriate ecclesial construct within any cultural context. The sociological basis of positive deviance as a practice within the cultural context has implications and application for the development of the ecclesia amid marginalized. Since positive deviance works within a culture to identify the practices and strategies that bring about the accepted goals of the church, a process of training practitioners should be developed and engaged. Understanding the praxis of positive

⁶³ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 21–22.

deviance comes out of the theology of the *missio Dei* and is expressed in the *missio Christi*. Through the initiative of God by the Holy Spirit the practitioner of Positive Deviance is able to engage the process of challenging and changing ecclesial forms. The functionality of positive deviance in each context will produce an incarnational and missional community that engages the immediate context according to the unique construct of the culture as evidenced in the Acts of the Apostles.

A major component of positive deviance is the semiotic practice of learning to read the signs that reveal the practices and strategies of the positive deviants in new forms of ecclesial context. If the abilities of the positive deviants are discernable and their practices and strategies are reproducible within their context then it is conceivable the church may flourish in even broader contexts amid the pluralism within a global society. Learning from the practitioners of the Positive Deviance Approach amid alternative missional ecclesia has the potential of empowering contextualization with theological praxis. Studying the practitioner is necessary and requires a research method that will take into consideration more than facts, but considers the non-measurable intuitive intelligence of the practitioner. The research method that should bring out facts and intuitive intelligence is examined in the next section of this paper.

CHAPTER FIVE

DESIGN METHOD AND RESEARCH

The theological manuals written by those responsible for the mission of the people of God in the world must be subject to review by the reality of the presence and work of the Spirit through those engaged in the ‘frontline’ mission and ministry.¹

--Ray S. Anderson

Reflective Practitioner

During the spring and summer of 2011 data for this study was assembled on alternative missional churches from the “‘frontline’ mission and ministry” as a reflective practitioner. The alternative missional churches allege they are the result of the emergence of a new era that engages different ways of being and doing church through contextualization. Their focus is to missionally and contextually engage with their cultures and communities through an exercise of various innovative and culturally relevant expressions. Their practices and strategies reflect the rhetoric of Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch in the book *The Shaping of Things to Come*² and the general reality of alternative missional churches represented in this research. Engaging in this research as an interested participant the goal reflected in the research is from a hermeneutic of suspicion.³ The goal is to understand the reality of what is actually happening amid the alternative missional ecclesia for the potential of exposing unintentional Positive Deviance process and approach.

¹ Ray S. Anderson, *Ministry on the Fireline: A Practical Theology for an Empowered Church* (Fuller Seminary Press, 1998), 16.

² Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*.

³ The concept of a ‘hermeneutic of suspicion’ is used by liberation theologians in order to question ideologies and subconscious desires that maintain the status quo. Juan Luis Segundo, *Liberation of Theology* (Wipf and Stock Pub., 2002), 7–9.

Location, Location, Location

The location chosen for the research is purposefully limited within the Metro area of Portland. The limited location allows for a snap-shot view of a specific region and its cultural dynamics. The research method is focused on a phenomenological study of the representative ecclesia in order to draw out the dynamics of each ecclesia's practices and strategies amid their cultural environment. Each of the participating ecclesia was generously open to the research process. This section reflects on the research design and method, as well as my personal participation as a reflective practitioner.

Structure of the Study

The study is fashioned in such a manner that it reflects, primarily, the essential desires of learning firsthand about alternative missional ecclesia amid marginalized cultures and secondly to engage qualitative research and analysis. The approach of learning through a participant-observer location allows for firsthand engagement of the subjects. This reflects a postmodern preference of learning from the local expressions instead of engaging metanarratives and grand theories. The primary objective is to learn, from the embedded local and particular expressions of the alternative missional ecclesia, about their contextualization process, as well as their specific innovative practices and strategies.

The study of the imaginative nature within each subject ecclesial expressions is to create a local and particular present-day perspective, in other words to investigate the reality of unintentional positive deviance practices and strategies. Hans Küng recommends, “. . . to think of any church as set apart from error and sin would be an ‘idealizing misconception’ which makes it ‘an unreal, distant ideal surrounded by a false halo, rather than a real

historical church.”⁴ It is in the unpacking of the practices and strategies of the alternative missional ecclesia that the reality of the need for an empowering contextualization with theological praxis is revealed in reality. The messy nature of humanity and church planting is not hidden from sight, but is openly engaged as part of the growth process. Moving beyond dwelling in the world of theory and ideals the focus of a local study, such as this one, allows the ability to evaluate contextualization amid the marginalized and reveal their practices and strategies in real time.

The study is aimed at learning not just what are the practices and strategies that bring about contextualization of the Gospel, but the how and why of the practices and strategies used to accomplish this goal. By tapping the practices and strategies the intent is to be able to learn about the motivation, mission and innovation of the practitioners. Thereby, allowing them to become the inspiration for other ministries and to invite others to become the next wave of practitioners, to learn similar and unique processes that will empower contextualization with theological praxis.

Limits of Qualitative Research

The focus of the thesis is upon ecclesia amid marginalized people is meant to assist in gaining understanding of what is happening amid alternative missional ecclesia. The implication is that what emerges is an understanding of alternative missional ecclesia in a broader perspective. Therefore, following a qualitative research methodology allows for the recording of experiences of the practices and strategies within each ecclesial context.

⁴ Hans Küng, *The Church* (Image Books, 1976), 131.

Qualitative methods in the study of contextualization and theological praxis are important, but do present some difficulties. First, it was necessary to deal with the issue of limiting the study to only a local and particular context. Each of the subject alternative missional ecclesia engages practices and strategies that allow them to be relevant within their particular post-Christian and postmodern contexts. The ecclesial expressions each have specific results that are unique to their community context. This creates an inability to extrapolate the data into just general principles or presuppositions. The implication suggests that the research may not delineate into generalizations or absolute principles, nor claim to be fully conclusive in the matter of empowering contextualization. Second, the historical aspect of the research offers a specific snapshot of each alternative missional ecclesia in their context. The nature of the alternative missional ecclesia is fluid and therefore may be experiencing a new era of formulation or a transition to a new incarnation. Third, the data yielded by the research is limited due to mixed levels of subjective and objective observations. The human factor of a predisposition towards personal perspective limits qualitative data and its adequacy to validate theories, but the strength of qualitative research allows the human experience (reality) to come to the forefront of the data. Fourth, there is the personal association as a participant in an alternative missional ecclesia, *missio Christi* Church in Aloha, Oregon. As a practitioner in an alternative missional ecclesia this required a reflective approach. Recognizing my personal biases about the data necessitated attempting to articulate it without interjecting presuppositions. In the analysis of the data a conscious attempt was made to avoid presuppositions, but as a practitioner, some allowance for biases were made when they may well contribute to interpretation of the data.

Acknowledging Bias

Considered here is an identification and articulation of the presuppositions that I brought into the task of collecting the research, in other words an acknowledging of biases. It is important to clarify biases before beginning research. A major formative influence in the papers approach is my involvement as a practitioner in an alternative missional ecclesia. Participating in an emerging church allows for both an insider's perspective and an outsider's suspicion in collecting the data. Edmund Husserl suggests that idyllic researchers may "bracket out" the influence of their personal experience contaminated by their own culture.⁵ Husserl's idyllic researcher does not exist, as his perspective is unrealistic and alienates reality. Experience has value and my experience as a reflective practitioner allows a value to be placed upon my own experience in the research. The result of valuing my own experience should help sharpen my capabilities as a phenomenological researcher.

Phenomenological research is not founded within objective scientific methods. In support of this position noted philosopher and researcher Hans-Georg Gadamer argues that "preoccupation with objective scientific methods is antithetical to the spirit of human science scholarship."⁶ The implication is that superlative research method in disciplines concerning humans, sociology and anthropology for instance, includes participation in the human experience, an insider's perspective, and not standing at a distance from it, an outsider's perspective.

A relationship within the environment of the alternative missional church has allowed the development of a fuller understanding of the value of contextualization and the positive

⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (Taylor & Francis, 2010), 94–104.

⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (Continuum, 1994), 3.

deviance practices and strategies amid the subjects of this research. Some of the leaders of the various expressions of ecclesia in this study are valued practitioners and friends. The research is not meant to be an evaluation of the work of these practitioners and friends, but a drawing out of the how and what of their practices and strategies in order to understand their contextualization process and theological praxis. Understanding the purpose of this study they openly shared their experiences and the desire for constructive critique. Truth-telling in the research is a high priority, so great effort was put into not allowing friendship or investment to hinder it. The goal in this research is, as a scholar, to bring helpful contributions to the conversation of empowering contextualization with theological praxis. Sometimes this takes the form of critical critiques as well as positive comments whenever appropriate. Whether or not an appropriate objective perspective is sustained or sufficient is hopefully shown in the observations about the subject ecclesia's contextualization amid their practices and strategies in sharing the Gospel. Being a practitioner of an alternative missional ecclesia brings forth a deep appreciation for the little rewarded efforts of these practitioners and is reflected in my appreciation of the strengths they display.

Interpretational Biases

Interpretation of research in the phenomenological method according to Michael Crotty aims at “putting oneself in the place of the other.”⁷ It is a purposeful exercise in order to gain a fresh perspective of the world. It is appropriate to identify my particular location in the milieu of this research and recognizes its influence upon my opinions and conclusions.

⁷ Michael Crotty, *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process* (SAGE, 1998), 83–86.

The experience and background of being engaged in an alternative missional ecclesia actually helps in the ability to interpret the experience of the study group. Engaging in the “hermeneutical circle”⁸ as Martin Heidegger suggests is appropriate because the interpretation comes out of participation. Rather than gather understanding from an outsider’s perspective of the circle and analyze experience as objective, an external perspective, the researcher leaps into the circle of meaning. By following the phenomenological approach the study becomes an exercise in seeking to understand the experiences, practices, and strategies of the alternative missional ecclesia in Portland through the advantage and perspective of my background and experience. To suggest otherwise would be misleading about having an expectation of complete neutrality and objectivity.

Insider’s View

Don Browning states, “Most of us stand on the boundary: religious communities attract us; we may even participate in them; but we also wonder if they make sense.”⁹ Browning’s comment resonates with this practitioner. Does church make sense? The research for this project began after I finished an eighteen month assignment, which ended in May of 2010, as the pastor of a Friends’ Church in Vancouver Washington. The motivation for this project was fostered by a deep desire to make sense of the experience that was steeped in strong traditions and to explore what other alternatives exist. What is clear to me from the experience is that often churches are well established in their traditions to the extent that innovations are met with deep suspicion and resistance. Two questions fueled the initiation of

⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1962), 168–154, 194, 363.

⁹ Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Fortress Press, 1996), 1.

the project: First, does the potential exist to reestablish churches as an incarnational and missional community and how might this be accomplished? Second, is it more advantageous to establish new churches which are contextual, incarnational and missional from their beginning? Third, how might the practices and strategies of the Positive Deviance approach be effective in ecclesial contexts?

In October of 2010, shortly before beginning the research for this project, my wife and I started an alternative missional church as an expression of the desire to learn and grow toward a contextual and theological praxis that meaningfully met the needs of the community. The experience has established both an insider's perspective into the dynamics of the Attractional, Propositional and Colonial form of church, as well as an insider's view of being a practitioner of an alternative missional church. The insider's perspective into traditional and alternative missional church gives an outlet for the application of the research findings.

Therefore, when approaching the study group I recognized that I came not just as a researcher, but as a practitioner: as a Christ follower (Christian), as an ordained pastor, and a missional church practitioner and participant. The research contained within this study occurs more from an *emic* rather than an *etic* approach. Ferraro, a noted anthropologist, describes the differences,

The emic approach refers to the insider view, which seeks to describe another culture in terms of the categories, concepts, and perceptions of the people being studied. By contrast, the etic approach refers to the outsider view, in which anthropologists use their own categories and concepts to describe the culture under analysis.¹⁰

The result is an ability to connect with the native informants within each alternative missional ecclesia, enhancing the research. The questions for the research group were guided

¹⁰ Ferraro, *Cultural Anthropology*, 17.

by my background and interests. The lack of detachment allowed the subjects to feel a kindred connection and produced an eager participation. The research was not bogged down by the typical dilemma an outsider may have faced attempting the same research of the contextualization practices and strategies. Nevertheless, it is true that my religious and missional participation coupled with personal knowledge and experiences do inevitably influence my research methodology.

Methodology

In forming a methodology for the research section of this project the strategy involves identifying a research group from a pool of potential alternative missional ecclesia in Portland. The focus is an engagement of contextualization with theological praxis, a bridging of theory and practice in reality. The intent of the methodology is to explore the phenomenon and ecclesial dynamics represented in the contextualization and the positive deviance practices and strategies of the research group according to each individual expression. The focus considers the innovation of the practices and strategies for application in contemporary culture through the experiences of the alternative missional churches. Following this postmodern form, the participants of the study were assembled from the innovators of ecclesia rather than the teaching experts represented in popular church planting institutes.

Research Questions

The focus of the research centered on the practices and strategies of contextualization and theological praxis amid alternative missional ecclesia. Similarly, but unlike Frost and

Hirsch's focus on the categories of mission and innovation.¹¹ Does the reality of the practices and strategies result in contextualization of the Gospel amid marginalized people? The research seeks to understand how and why each practitioner fosters fresh practices and strategies in their own context. The application of a "hermeneutic of suspicion," is due to the shifting paradigm of the emerging ecclesial cultures. The basic assumption of the research is the investigation of how and what practices and strategies are actually occurring and whether or not there exists an intentional or unintentional praxis of the positive deviance approach. The hope is to initiate a process that would reveal the intuitive character of the practitioners.

The research questions sought to explore each group's individual innovations and cultural wisdom. The intended goal of the research is to discover the successful practices and strategies formed from within the innovation and behaviors of the native community, then to delineate the data for the purpose of enabling others to engage in a similar praxis by developing a plan of action to promote the adoption of the practices and strategies. The end goal would result in contextualization empowered with theological praxis for the expansion of the gospel amid the marginalized.

The basic question for the research is grounded in the desire to understand; what can we learn from the alternative missional ecclesia in Portland? What practices and strategies are the ecclesia engaging? What similarities and differences occur in understanding cultural context? How are the innovation of practices and strategies encouraged? Is a culture of change intentionally encouraged? The research was guided by these questions. The interest of the research was to bring out their processes, seemingly insignificant phenomena, innovation and intuitiveness that influence the practices and strategies of the group.

¹¹ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 3-16.

Research Group

Initially the sample group for this research project began with twelve potential representative churches. Each church was identified as a possible alternative missional church engaged in ministry amid the marginalized. An avoidance of self-identified emergent and missional churches became necessary due to contemporary churches using the terms as a smoke screen in an attempt to connect with postmodern culture. The twelve churches were representative of a variety of forms, structures and approaches. Nonetheless, out of the initial sample group six were not available or accessible. A later development reduced the sample group to five. Four of the five subjects in the study group are located within the Portland city proper and the fifth is located in Sherwood, a suburb of the Portland metro area.

The sample group consists of forms and manifestations of ecclesia seeking to be relevant within the post-Christendom and postmodern context of Portland. The settings offer a mixture of people, culture and approaches representing practices and strategies that are relevant to their specific social domain, thus demanding extremely different contextualization processes and formulation.

Data Collection

The research data for this study was collected through a process of personal interviews and a firsthand experience of observing the gathering of the ecclesia in their native context. The interview questions were formulated as open-ended questions such as what, how, why, when, why now and why not? The interview questions were meant to facilitate or refocus discussions in order to bring out each subject's expression of their ecclesia's contextualization process and their positive deviance process regarding the groups' practices

and strategies. The experience of the initial interview process did not yield decisive information revealing the how and what of the practices and strategies. It was decided to reformulate the interview process using a narrative format by asking fluid questions that led to storytelling, as expressed by D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly in *Narrative Inquiry*.¹² Each interview was recorded and as each practitioner was interviewed clarifying questions were interjected whenever necessary. The narrative interview strategy produced a much fuller interview revealing the intuitions and innovativeness of the participants' strategies and practices.

Additional data was collected, wherever possible, through the observation of the practitioners engaged in the activities of their practices and strategies. In some cases this involved observing the gathering of the ecclesia. Other times it was observing interaction in various social settings including streets, coffee house and parks. As a researcher it was necessary to maintain a posture of "blending into the landscape, adopting the natural contours of the social topography."¹³ The benefit of being engaged as a practitioner of alternative missional ecclesia allowed my presence and proximity as one of the tribe. The benefit of being indigenous allowed the study group to reveal their actual practices, especially the uncommon practices, even practices they were not conscious of engaging (i.e. of the invisible not yet visible).¹⁴

¹² D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research* (Jossey-Bass, 2004), 121.

¹³ Pascale et al., *The Power of Positive Deviance*, 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process uses a method based in grounded theory, in order to identify the practices and strategies of the sample group. Grounded theory functions from the perspective of “the collection of data is guided strategically by the developing theory.”¹⁵ The practice of grounded theory as a research method operates in contradiction with and to the scientific method. In summary, the scientific method begins with a hypothesis while methodology of grounded theory performs a reverse engineering of a hypothesis. The system does not begin with a hypothesis as its basis, but the hypothesis is created through the collection of data by various modes that extract information, forming the codes and categories that become the basis for the creation of a theory. In collecting anthropological or sociological data the traditional mode of research does not consider inductive and deductive thinking, whereas grounded theory generates conceptual ideologies requiring an intuitive process within the experiences of the sample group.¹⁶ The resulting analysis is processed through inductive and deductive thinking which allows for the intuitive nature of the experiences of the sample group to formulate the hypothesis.

The narrative nature of the data is undoubtedly subjective due to the influence of the perception of the participants own realities. The subjectivity of the human experience reveals the common threads in human culture. This allowed the practices and strategies to be conceptualized and codified as the core of the research focused upon the positive deviance practitioners. The critical aspect in the data analysis is the relevance of the practices and strategies in light of the positive deviance process and approach amid the marginalized.

¹⁵ Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (Taylor & Francis, 2007), 6.

¹⁶ G. Allan, “A critique of using grounded theory as a research method,” *Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods* 2, no. 1 (2003): 1–10.

After the collection and initial analysis of the data in an effort to check the trustworthiness of the finding, it was attempted wherever possible to present the analysis with the research participants and peers. Throughout the research and analysis phase of this project other pastors and community participants were involved in evaluating the findings and to query my analysis tentative to final presentation of the findings. The next section of this project represents the interpretation and analysis of the research and a conclusion of the findings that empowering contextualization with theological praxis is indeed not only possible, but is in many cases being unintentionally engaged through the use of the positive deviance approach amid alternative missional ecclesia.

CHAPTER SIX

PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH AND CONCLUSION

The church exists as community, servant, and messenger of the reign of God in the midst of other kingdoms, communities, and powers that attempt to shape our understanding of reality. The world of those kingdoms, communities, and powers often opposes, ignores, or has other priorities than the reign of God. To that world, the missional church is apostolic – sent out on behalf of the reign of God.¹

--Guder and Barrett

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to inspire ecclesial leadership to adopt the Positive Deviance Approach in order to empower ecclesial contextualization of the Gospel with theological praxis amid marginalized people. The purpose is demonstrated in the thesis of this paper that alternate missional ecclesia is able to create and sustain ecclesial communities amid marginalized people, in society where other ecclesial methodologies have experienced more failure than success. The alternate missional ecclesia, provide support for empowering contextualization with theological praxis to create and sustain ecclesial communities amid marginalized people through their uninformed use of the Positive Deviance Approach, coupled with their unique strategies and practices.

This paper has explored the intractable problem of the institutional church's attempt to share the Gospel amid the marginalized people of Portland. The problem and cultural issues were discussed and the probable solution is suggested as engaging a deviance approach that would allow the creation and sustaining of ecclesial communities through adopting the Positive Deviance Approach. This paper went on to demonstrate that the practices and strategies of Jesus followed a discernable pattern of cultural deviance within the Judaic culture similar to the Positive Deviance Approach. Jesus' methods, recorded as a

¹ Guder and Barrett, *Missional church*, 110.

narrative descriptive Christology form a theological praxis, modeled an approach of engaging the marginalized people amid his culture through positive deviance. He practiced his theology praxis amid his community and culture. Further, this paper demonstrated the history of the early church followed a trajectory of ecclesial contextualization with a theological praxis that followed Jesus' example. The cultural ecclesial contextualization in the book of Acts showed the trajectory of the church moving from an exclusive Judaic cultural context and expanding to Gentile cultural context in Antioch. Next this paper demonstrated that a basis exists for a theological praxis for the Positive Deviance Approach in ecclesial contexts, as found in the descriptive Christology in the Gospels. Next this paper presented a research methodology. In this section of the paper the research and the conclusion are presented with recommendations for engaging the Positive Deviance Approach amid marginalized people and ecclesial contexts.

The research presented in this paper shows how the alternative missional ecclesia has created and are sustaining their individual expressions of ecclesia amid the marginalized people of the Portland Metro Area. The research presentation includes a review of the data collection process, the criteria for the selection of participating ecclesia, a brief biography of the ecclesia, and an evaluation of the practices and strategies in comparison with the Positive Deviance Approach.

Data Collection

The data collection for this paper was through a process of personal interviews and a first-hand observation of the alternative ecclesia amid their cultural context. A one-on-one interview was arranged with the practitioners. Questions were open-ended questions such as:

what, how, why, when, why now and why not? The interview questions were meant to facilitate or refocus discussions in order to bring out the expression of each ecclesia's contextualization process and their positive deviance approach. The initial interview process did not yield decisive information that fully revealed their positive deviance approach. The initial lack of transparency was due to apprehension of being criticized and condemned. I decided to reformulate the interview process to accommodate a narrative format by asking fluid questions that led to storytelling. Each interview was recorded via a digital recorder. The narrative interview strategy produced a much fuller interview process by revealing the participants' strategies and practices as Positive Deviance practitioners.

The practitioners were observed engaging in their practices and strategies. In some cases this involved observing the gathering of the ecclesia. Other times it was observing interaction in various social settings including streets, coffee houses and parks. In addition the internet was explored for websites, blogs and social media whenever it was available as a potential source to reveal practices and strategies. The data was collected and according the methods of grounded theory, processed and codified. The categories that emerged from within the research are 1) Intuitive; 2) Innovative; 3) Adaptive; 4) Counterintuitive and 5) Indigenous. The categories represent the nature of the Positive Deviance Approach utilized amid the research group.

Participants

The initial research identified a group of twelve potential churches in the Portland Metro area that met the criteria that they created and are sustaining an alternative missional ecclesial community amid marginalized people. The research group was reduced to four of

the representative ecclesia participating in the project. The reduction was due in part to several ecclesias within the group that desired not to gain any type of attention to themselves due to the potential denominational criticism. They desired to “remain under the radar” as one of the leaders indicated. Out of respect for their wishes they were excluded from the research group, but an open invitation to return and participate in their communities was extended to us.

Introduction of the Research Group

The remaining ecclesias are located amid marginalized groups within the designated research area. The representative research group demonstrates unique and yet complementary practices and strategies that reflect a clear desire to be an incarnational and missional community amid marginalized people. Each ecclesia represents a separate marginalized people with some cross-over or mingling, but in most ways reflects what is unique amid their community.

Theophilus – A Christian Community

Theophilus² is a little over two years from its inception making it one of the younger ecclesia in this research group. It is included within this research group due to its unique growth and sustainability amid its context. Theophilus was started by A.J. Swoboda³ and his wife Quinn. Theophilus is located within the Hawthorne District in SE Portland. The Hawthorne district is a unique and popular district within the Portland Metro area. It is comprised of six neighborhoods Richmond, Buckmann, Hosford-Abernathy, Ladd’s

² <http://theophiluschurch.com/>

³ For biographical information concerning A.J. and Quinn please see <http://ajswoboda.com/about>.

Addition, Sunnyside and Mt. Tabor. It is known for a diverse population that is considered resistant to the Gospel. The Portland Neighborhoods website gives a colorful description of the residents of this district, “There are a lot of words you could use to describe the locals who live in the Hawthorne District; activist, environmentalist, educated, opinionated, hippie, hipster, Gen X-er, entrepreneur. . . and more.”⁴ The leadership of Theophilus purposefully located within this area due to the profile of the population. The Swoboda’s and the leadership team moved from Eugene, Oregon, from a neighborhood district that whose occupants were close to the University of Oregon. The proximity to the University of Oregon resulted in an almost mirror reflection of the Hawthorne District in Portland.

Resonate Christian Church

Resonate Christian Church⁵ is located in Sherwood Oregon. Sherwood⁶ is considered a bedroom community of Portland, Oregon. Sherwood is a small city with just over 18,000 people. Touring the city one experiences the sense that it is a family oriented city with a focus upon sports activities. There are a significant number of sporting complexes and sports oriented businesses. The marginalization is not obvious to the casual observer, but to the leadership of Resonate Christian Church, Sherwood represents a unique opportunity for the Gospel. Residents of the city, who work mostly in downtown Portland, experience a high divorce rate due to their affluence. According to Kevin Bates, founder and lead pastor of Resonate, the city has experienced a significant number of church plant failures over the last decade. These failures have produced an attitude of distrust for any group attempting to

⁴ <http://www.portlandneighborhood.com/Hawthornee.html>

⁵ <http://resonatecc.com/>

⁶ <http://www.sherwoodchamber.org/>

church plant amid Sherwood's population, creating a community of marginalized people. Bates and leadership of Resonate were attracted to Sherwood due the issue of sustainability of a church plant amid the population there.

The Bridge Christian Church

The Bridge Christian Church⁷ is currently located in NE Portland at the corner of North Williams Ave and North East Tillamook St. The Bridge is the oldest alternative missional ecclesia represented in the research group. It was started by Deborah and Ken Loyd and Crystal Ward in 1998 when they left the institutional church after engaging their passion for those who are marginalized. The Bridge over the past decade has been through several cultural shifts or reinventions as Deborah refers to them. Initially, punk-rockers were the main occupants of the Bridge, but subsequent shifts brought other generations and expressions of marginalized people to participate in the Bridge. The current context of the Bridge engages several generations and marginal people, such as millennials, anarchists, Christarchists, artist, and musicians. The Bridge appears to have a natural ability to engage the community it resides within, allowing it to have a broad level of interactions with marginalized people from various backgrounds. The present leadership has risen up out of the midst of the community represented in the Bridge. The leadership consists of three pastors who function as equals.

⁷ <http://thebridgeportland.org/>

HomePDX

HomePDX⁸ is located in the heart of downtown Portland. It is daughter church birthed out of the Bridge Christian Church. The HomePDX was created for “our friends without houses.”⁹ The context of HomePDX is centered on caring for the homeless and the poor in downtown Portland. Ken Loyd founded HomePDX initially to reach street kids, called “gutter punks.” Bruce Arnold has joined him now as part of HomePDX leadership. During the warmer months of the year HomePDX meets under the Hawthorne Bridge and during the colder months they find a home meeting in the basement of a downtown church. HomePDX doesn’t operate as the Gospel Union or the other outreaches to poor, homeless and marginalized people in downtown Portland. The HomePDX goes beyond providing for the physical needs of the house-less, but provides an actual community for marginalized people to belong too.

Practitioner Analysis

Theophilus – A Christian Community

Theophilus came about through A.J. and Quinn Swoboda’s deep passion for the Hawthorne District of Portland. It began for them while sitting at a coffee house on SE Belmont St. A.J. stated, “It was like being at home.” When describing the people represented at the coffee house he talked about the tattoos, rings and piercings. For A.J. and Quinn this was not a new cultural experience, but a very familiar cultural environment due to their experiences in Eugene, Oregon. A.J. and Quinn were the campus pastors for the Onyx

⁸ <http://www.homepdx.net/>

⁹ Ken Loyd.

House¹⁰ at the University of Oregon. It is an extension ministry of the youth ministry of Eugene Faith Center.

The vision for Theophilus was shared with those in the community in Eugene to begin a church plant in the Hawthorne District. Theophilus was an intentional church plant amid a largely non-religious, but highly spiritual community.¹¹ When sharing about the plan for the creation of Theophilus, A.J. indicated that the considerations included some very specific activities that reflect the Positive Deviance Approach. What I gleaned from my time with A.J., as well as spending some time amid the community and reading available website materials, is that as an alternative missional ecclesia Theophilus falls into the categories of indigenous and counterintuitive positive deviance. These categories are due to their own identification with the Hawthorne District and their ability to contextualize for a pluralistic culture as seen in this analysis.

Describing A.J. is an interesting challenge. He is eclectic and maybe the best way to characterize him would be to state that he is a Geek for God. He wears his shirts un-tucked and has an unpretentious attitude that comes through when you talk and listen to him. He is relaxed in his approach: when preaching and does not use a pulpit or music stand, but is down in the aisle amid the people. He is expressive, but not over the top when he speaks. It gives a person the sense of his openness and approachability. The sermon is not a one way conversation, it is presented in a conversational format where the congregation is encouraged to wrestle with the scripture and share their thoughts as well. This conversational style gives validity to the voice of the congregation. A.J. is not the most radical Positive Deviance

¹⁰ <http://www.eugenefaithcenter.org/youth/college/college-group/>

¹¹ Driving through the Hawthorne District a person will observe displays of spirituality from Buddhist prayer flags, chakra symbols, Dharma gods and goddesses, displays of neo-paganism, Wicca and neo-druidism.

Approach practitioners I have observed. But he is authentic as a human being and Christ follower.

My reasons for categorizing Theophilus in two categories is due to A.J. and Quinn's experiences living in Eugene, placing them culturally amid people they resided amongst, and intentionally planting Theophilus amid what is considered by many in Portland to be the most resistant to the Gospel. Since their start date, Theophilus has experienced growth from fifteen people meeting in a home to averaging one hundred people regularly at the writing of this paper.

The practices and strategies of Theophilus do not follow the typical church planting model. The demonstration of the following practices and strategies indicate that Theophilus is engaged in ecclesial contextualization with theological praxis empowered by the Positive Deviance Approach. In order to facilitate understanding of the practices and strategies I will delineate them along with an explanation. I will follow this method of reporting the critical observations surrounding practices and strategies throughout this section of the paper.

Theophilus Practices and Strategies:

First, listening to A.J. it became clear that the four D's (define, determine, discover, and design)¹² of positive deviance process were engaged. An exegesis of the community amid the Hawthorne district became the road map leading Theophilus toward an understanding of the context of the culture in the district. Their indigenous leanings help assist in an easy assimilation into the Districts communities.

¹² Pascale et al., *The Power of Positive Deviance*, 195.

Second, Theophilus engages the culture of the Hawthorne District from within the culture. In the placement of Theophilus' presence and proximity were critical to the team. This was accomplished by locating themselves within the neighborhoods of the district where cultural context would allow integration to the community. The cultural connection amid the community was a primary focus of leadership in Theophilus as they sought to follow where Christ was leading them.

Third, Theophilus as a community has the ability to “navigate creating its own identity.” The existence of a top down hierarchy of the pastor being in charge of everything and every decision is not practiced at Theophilus. Instead, the community gathers once a term for a community forum allowing the community to be engaged in shaping the vision of Theophilus. A collective identity is created amid the community through the community designing its own practices; this is a clear positive deviance practice. The collective intelligence of the community is trusted to engage the mission of God.

Fourth, the community of Theophilus is adaptive to internal diversity. A.J characterized the community of Theophilus as a “contextual open society.” The contextual openness is counterintuitive to the institutional church's modeling of church planting. The focus is not upon the church as an entity where people may be considered expendable, but is focused instead upon people, because people are not expendable. A.J.'s interview indicated the engagement of a descriptive Christology as the ecclesia of Theophilus seeks to follow Christ in his present activities amid humanity. He said, “We are not taking Christ to the Hawthorne District; he is already present and active in the community.” Everyone is welcome amid the community of Theophilus.

Concerning the adaptive abilities of Theophilus A.J. referenced the 1987 movie *Harry and the Hendersons*,¹³ the story of family that works to adapt to having a Bigfoot (Harry) as part of their family, as he describes this aspect of the community of Theophilus. Quoting A.J., “Jesus loves Harry. The church has to be uncomfortable changing who we are for people who don’t fit.” The community reflects this level of commitment to people.

Fifth, Theophilus has a three main ways of expressing itself amid the culture; Tents, Tables and Tears. Tents, has to deal with the gathering of Theophilus for worship and expressing their spirituality. People are invited to journey along with them without crossing a line of faith, but instead are allowed to freely experience the reality of the spiritual life. Part of this openness involves having an open communion table where all are welcome to partake. Tables involve intentional focus upon food and community through eating together whenever possible and as part of the gathering. This practice is intentionally designed to emulate Jesus’ table fellowship. Tears involve an intuitive sense for following Jesus Christ’s example in service amid the neighborhoods of the Hawthorne district and beyond. They engage the house-less community of the Hawthorne District by cooperating with Hands On Greater Portland.¹⁴ They encourage the practice of random acts of kindness amidst daily activities such as mowing lawns, clearing refuse, making themselves available to transport people, and being present to their neighbors. The community helps provide food and clothing by participating in and with the local food banks. It is a purposeful theological praxis of engaging the *missio Christi*, the mission of Christ.

This is a basic overview of the practices and strategies of Theophilus – A Christian Community. The information available through the interview and my personal observations

¹³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_and_the_Hendersons.

¹⁴ <http://www.handsonportland.org/>

are plentiful enough to make Theophilus the sole focus of this paper, but due to space being as concise as possible is important. With that said, the community of Theophilus and its leadership demonstrate the Positive Deviance Approach amid a marginalized people according to the criteria established for Positive Deviance process.

The evidence of the effects of Theophilus following a Positive Deviance Approach is witnessed in a blog review called *Year of Sundays: we go to church so you don't have to*. It is written by Amanda P. Westmont and her partner Joel Gunz.¹⁵ Amanda and Joel are self-proclaimed agnostics, but have engaged in this unique project of attending church every Sunday for a year and blogging about their experience as guests. Amanda reflected about her experience at Theophilus,

I'll be honest: part of me hoped this church would suck, just so I could call it THEAWFULEST, but there was nothing awful about it. In fact, y'all'll have to excuse me while I gush a bit because I genuinely adored this church, its steeple and how when you opened it up, inside were real people.¹⁶

Amanda's and Joel's blog has not been kind to the many churches that they have visited in Portland, but one thing is evident through their blogging about Theophilus is that anyone would be able to join in the community of Theophilus and know they are genuinely accepted. Amanda's experience at Theophilus was profound. So much so she expressed in the blog that she had experienced her first authentic spiritual experience. Amanda and Joel's blog gives credibility to the Positive Deviance Approach engaged at Theophilus as successfully creating an ecclesial contextualization amid a marginalized district of Portland.

¹⁵ The author introduction descriptions state, "Amanda P. Westmont is a lifelong church-phobic agnostic who woke up one day and decided it was time to see how (and why!) the other half was living and Joel Gunz's past as a sexually-repressed non-Christmas-celebrating Jehovah's Witness uniquely qualifies him to sit in the back pew and shoot spit wads at the choir," <http://blog.beliefnet.com/yearofsundays/>.

¹⁶ Amanda P. Westmont and Joel Gunz, <http://blog.beliefnet.com/yearofsundays/2011/05/theophilus-church-foursquare-done-right.html>.

Theophilus purposefully positioned itself amid a community that resembled their own indigenous culture. They provide counterintuitive community through a contextually open community that welcomes everyone as they are to experience their spirituality. In their practices they engage their community through an intuitive following the Holy Spirit's activities amid the people of the Hawthorne District by the means of service and unconditional acceptance of others. Theophilus demonstrates the essential traits of Positive Deviance Approach.

Resonate Christian Church

Resonate Christian Church was founded by Kevin and Amanda Bates amid the resistant and marginalized people of the city of Sherwood. Bates was attracted to the community of Sherwood due to its history. He shared the community's experience leading it to become resistant to the Gospel. He stated, "In a twenty-one year period seventeen churches were planted in Sherwood and all but two of those church plants have closed their doors. This created a very resistant community that views church plants negatively." He noted that there was a lot of hurt and pain due to having such a large number of church plants fail and people felt spiritually abused. Therefore, whenever a new church plant appeared the attitude amongst the people was "how long will this one last?" The attitude was one of distrust amid the community.

Kevin is tall, rowdy and expressive as a person, yet very approachable. He impressed me with his down to earth demeanor during the interview process. He consistently brought theory back to the practical. The focus on being practical indicated to me that Kevin has thought through his theology of the church. He shared that the theoretical nature of

propositional truth has its limitations in real life application in the Kingdom of God. Kevin expressed that his passion is to incarnate the presence of Christ in a tangible manner expressing the presence of the Kingdom of God active in community. He said, “Christ is the center of all our activities.” In the interview process Bates revealed practices and strategies that would place Resonate Christian Church within the categories of innovative and adaptive positive deviance process. Resonate engaged a process of ecclesial contextualization with theological praxis by emulating the Positive Deviance Approach.

Resonate Practices and Strategies

While interviewing Kevin the four D’s (define, determine, discover, and design)¹⁷ of positive deviance process were described in detail within the planning of this particular ecclesia. Kevin described an intentionally relational approach, due to the contextual need of the community of Sherwood for a meaningful presence amid the people in order to develop trust. Following the four D’s allowed Bates and his team to fully exegete the community of Sherwood. His familiarity with Leonard Sweet influenced him to follow the missional, relational and incarnational lifestyle amid the people of Sherwood.

First, the Resonate planting team engaged the culture of Sherwood. Bates and his team had no problem fitting in culturally, but the issue was creating a culture of trust for the team amongst the greater community. Having exegeted the community Bates determined the main areas of cultural focus that would best create trust was to engage family, education and business in the Sherwood context. The team engaged the YMCA initially and assisted with

¹⁷ Pascale et al., *The Power of Positive Deviance*, 195.

the various programs offered to families. By volunteering as coaches, referees and in the after school tutoring offered at the YMCA the Resonate community created an initial positive presence in the greater community. From there the team moved into assisting the school district asking to help fill whatever their critical needs were. It turned out that tutoring was their greatest area of need. The team provided teams of tutors for the elementary and middle school students.

Availability to fill the real needs of the community of Sherwood represents the greatest point of impact by the RCC team. Bates then turned his attention to engaging the city council itself and asking what Resonate could do for the city and doing whatever menial task was available: tasks such as providing teams to refresh the landscaping of the local educational facilities. Intentionally engaging these three areas allowed the Resonate team to gain clout with the community, thus developing a culture of trust. As Resonates' culture of giving to the community through volunteerism and service they began to experience growth in the gathering. Creating cultural clout in this manner reflects the Positive Deviance process by engaging the life of the greater community. In the interview Bates told me of an encounter he had amid a meeting of the community pastors and the mayor. The mayor had called the meeting to engage the faith communities as a way to help meet needs in the city. The local clergy were interested in presenting the Gospel and did not connect with how serving the community related. Resonate turned this attitude upside down and made themselves available to the mayors request. By connecting with the values of the city and the city's leadership Resonates' practices and strategies reflect a positive deviance approach, where as the majority of other churches in the community were not engaged. By being present and available Resonate has created a new perspective of church in its community.

Second, the issue of long-term sustainability of the church plant was a concern. Repeating the past would have been an unforgivable sin and would drive another proverbial nail into the resistance of city to the Gospel. Bates desired to support the ecclesia financially in an additional manner rather than just depending upon church offerings for its sole support. At the same time the desire of Resonate was to create a larger presence amid the community drove the direction of the team to consider other options. The eventual solution was to create a for profit business model¹⁸ to help support the church and give back to the community. Resonate created an additional identity amid the community through the development and successful launching of Symposium Coffee house¹⁹ near downtown.

The business allowed for the employment of Resonate staff by creating an alternate income source other than church offerings. It also allowed the presence and proximity of Resonate to expand more into the community by creating a third space. The creation of a third space, the coffee house, formed an additional community connection point. The net result has been the creation of the most popular coffee house in Sherwood and a broader recognition of Resonate. The intractable problem of sustainability, which was the reason for the failure of church plants in Sherwood, and securing a solid presence amid the Sherwood community, was effectively solved through a positive deviance process of innovative and intuitive thinking and problem solving.

Third, the Resonate gatherings are characterized by the community identity. The pastor is not up on a platform, but is down in the midst of the congregation. In addition the sermon is interactive with the congregation. The interactive nature allows for questions and

¹⁸ Eric Bahme, *MBE Mission-Based Entrepreneur Revolution* (KingdomPoint International, 2009).

¹⁹ Symposium Coffee House has become a success in the community employing five employees, including some staff from Resonate Church, <http://www.symposiumcoffee.com>.

clarification between the speaker and the congregation. The valuation of the contribution of the congregation appears to enhance the identification and the connection amid the community. In this manner Resonate has created an environment where the community helps to create its own identity through participation with the pastor. Wisdom and understanding are not exclusive to the pastor, but is co-mingled from the congregation with the pastor as a facilitator of truth. This practice is an intentional activity practiced amid the pastors at Resonate as a strategy for the purpose of creating connection with the community amid the ecclesia. It also provides a level of transparency in favor of the pastor amongst the people who associate pastors with talking heads who monopolize all that is shared.

Resonate has applied a Positive Deviance Approach in creating a sustainable ecclesia in a community that has experienced more failed church plants than success. Their uses of the positive deviance process steps of engaging culture from within culture, creating community identity and designing practices has allowed it to follow a trajectory of successfully overcoming an intractable problem. Resonate has successfully emerged as an adaptive, indigenous and innovative alternative missional ecclesia through its presence and proximity and their consistency of intuitive service that has become recognized within the Sherwood community.

The Bridge Christian Church

The Bridge Christian Church represents the most radically contextualized alternative missional ecclesia within this paper. The story²⁰ of the Bridge begins with an organic emergence of a community amid the punk-rockers during the late 1990's. Through a series of

²⁰ For a brief story of the origins of the Bridge visit <http://thebridgeportland.org/about.php>

connections and events Ken, Deborah and Crystal were invited to come and help this fledgling community until they turned it over to the current leadership that was raised up from amid the ecclesia. From its inception the Bridge has been an alternative missional ecclesia that practiced the Positive Deviance Approach intuitively without knowing what they knew.²¹ For this reason the categories that the Bridge fits into are the intuitive, innovative and adaptive positive deviance processes. It has endured through several reinventions coming to its current incarnation mainly due to the characteristic of being a “contextual open society.”²² The interview process yielded so much information and data that a complete paper focused solely upon the practices and strategies of the Bridge could be written. The Bridge was created through trial and error by attempting different practices and strategies. The participants in the interview process researching the Bridge included past leadership represented by Deborah Loyd and current leadership represented by Angie and Todd Fadel.

Angie and Todd Fadel are a gregarious couple who have been with the Bridge from its beginning. They are musicians, artists, who are passionate about Christ and people, especially people who are displaced. Angie shared that the Bridge is the church of “comes as you really are.” Todd shared that the Bridge is “a true postmodern faith community” and they “practice a radical acceptance of others and scandalous grace.” The interview with Angie and Todd provided an excessive amount of data. Together their story is one of journeying through hard issues of the institutional church.

²¹ Pascale et al., *The Power of Positive Deviance*, 7.

²² “Contextual Open Society” would best be defined in alternative missional ecclesia as a community that is adaptive to the cultural paradigm shifts that require a fluidic contextualization in the life of the ecclesia. This term was supplied earlier in this section in the interview with A.J. Swoboda concerning the nature of adaptability within an alternative missional ecclesia. The term certainly fits within the transformations the Bridge has moved through during its tenure.

Bridge Practices and Strategies

The interview process revealed that the Bridge represents an organic community in which the Positive Deviance Approach results from an intuitive, innovative and adaptive intelligence found amid the leadership of the Bridge and the community that comprises the Bridge. The leadership struggled with how to contextualize the Gospel for the community they were now engaging. It was a community of young people who were very talented, artistic, musical, broken and flawed, yet spiritually hungry, but most of all did not relate or connect with the traditional church. The Bridge represents an early adaptation of the Positive Deviance Approach and should serve as representative model of how the Positive Deviance process works over time and does not result in quick fix or immediate gratification. In contrast the institutional church model would impose a conformity culture. This would be done in order to obtain its goals in a faster manner and attempt to avoid the messiness that comes with cultural self-identification with Christ as represented in the Bridge community. The contrast is a transformational culture that relies upon the work of the Holy Spirit, as represented in the Bridge, versus a forced cultural conformity, represented in the institutional church model.

The intractable issue for the Bridge was contextualization of the Gospel amid a non-religious, disenfranchised and marginalized people. The status quo practice of repackaging the institutional church as contextualization would not work with these people. The repackaging of the institutional church is represented by the use the music, language, clothes and cultural nuances in superficial attempt to connect amid marginalized people. The consequences of such a strategy and practice would have been catastrophic for the Bridge community. This is due to the non-conformist culture represented amid those who populated

the Bridge. The reaction to conformity, by being told what they would be expected to do in order to belong to the community would not have gone over well. The people populating the Bridge are independent thinkers and want to discover truth and life for themselves rather than being told what it is. If any situation resembles what was transpiring amid the community of the Bridge, it would be comparable to Antioch when the Hellenists took the Gospel amid the Greeks cultural context.²³

The initial leadership approached the problem from a cultural perspective. They engaged in cultural exegesis. The leadership asked, “Can we be you?” Cultural understanding was the highest priority. The journey into Positive Deviance process began with this step for the leadership of the Bridge. Intuitively, there was the understanding that they stood at the outside and were looking in and what needed to transpire was to step into the culture becoming one of them. The leadership went native. It is comparable to stepping through the looking glass, thus gaining a whole new perspective. By engaging the culture from within the culture the leadership validated the people and established the initial foothold that would develop their cultural clout.

Second, the leadership of the Bridge working within the culture began the process of navigating the community toward creating its own identity. This strategy began even before the first Sunday morning meeting of the Bridge. It was decided that the cultural identity of the people was important and the leadership was decidedly against the idea of practicing cultural imperialism, which is the practice of overlaying one culture on top of another, thereby subverting the resident culture to conform to the overlaid culture. At the first Sunday meeting of the Bridge, the community was given, even promised, the responsibility for

²³ See Chapter 3 pages 68-74 in order to review of the work of the Hellenist amid the Greeks in Antioch and the resulting communities.

developing the community's identity as "Christians." Ownership of the ecclesia belonged to the community. The structure was not hierarchal, but is flat and the pastors walked amid the people as one of them and not over them. Shepherding is done from in the midst of the "tribe." Leadership is from behind not out in front of the community. The community provides their direction and the leadership operates from a culturally responsive position rather than a dictating position.

Third, ownership of the community at the Bridge is invested amid the people. This would be considered extremely risky and defies the conventional wisdom amongst institutional church planting models. The leadership of the Bridge followed the PD process by trusting that the community itself held the answer or wisdom to self-organize and design its own practices. In designing their practices the driving theological praxis for the Bridge was formed within a theology of hospitality. An open hospitality means the free flow of ideas and the search for truth. It allows for open dialogue and nothing is off limits. The praxis of hospitality requires faith in what the Holy Spirit is actively pursuing amid the community and trusting God for the results. This praxis is messy, but deeply rewarding according to the leadership.

Fourth, the transformational nature of the community allows the community to be adaptive to cultural changes. Deborah describes the community as going through eras or incarnations. Another term used by Angie described the community reinventing itself. Deborah gave examples of how this transpires. Initially the occupants of the Bridge were punks and Gen-Xers making up the community. Several transition or reinventions have transpired and now the occupants of the Bridge are Millennials and Christ-archists (anarchists). This transformational nature represents the community itself is functioning in

positive deviance process. The community of the Bridge is adapting to the internal diversity that exists amid the attendees. The mode of operation is cultural inclusion, multicultural inclusion and context.

To illustrate the open contextual community that exists at the Bridge Amanda Westmont and Joel Gunz wrote about the Bridge in their blog *Year of Sundays: we go to church so you don't have to*. Joel comments on the atmosphere of the bridge,

In this come-as-you-are church, the pastors wear no fancy robes or expensive hair spray. A pulpit would be as out of place as Laura Bush at a cockfight. Instead, you'll see a slightly pudgy hipster couple switching off between sermonizing and cuddling their oh-too-cute baby. The Bridge is the kind of place you could only expect to see in a city that glorifies strange bicycles, house rock concerts and tofu . . . this blog's search for spiritual authenticity has yielded mixed results, this week, we found it in the unlikeliest of places: a multi-purpose yoga studio/art room/public space for hire. Welcome to The Bridge, captain.²⁴

Amanda "gushes" about the Bridge in her blog post titled *The Bridge: A Perfectly (Im) Perfect Christian Experience*,

This church doesn't have a PR department or a logo or a red velvet bag for your tithe. All they have is a scrappy, shared yoga studio on NE Tillamook and each other. The only thing I could find lacking at The Bridge was judgment. There is no "IF" at The Bridge. No qualifications. They literally DO love you just for being there. It's the "only a mother could love you" church. Everyone qualifies. Every. Single. Soul. The more flawed the better. And if I believed in God THAT would be the kind of God I'd want to worship. The one who made The Bridge possible.²⁵

The Bridge represents an incredible experiment in what it means to be the church amid marginalized people. The evidence for the intuitive, innovative and adaptive categories of the Positive Deviance Approach is all over the Bridge like children's finger prints on a glass door. The Bridge is a living organism. It lives within its environment (culture) and navigates

²⁴ Amanda P. Westmont and Joel Gunz, <http://blog.beliefnet.com/yearofsundays/2011/03/flea-market-cathedral.html>

²⁵ Amanda P. Westmont and Joel Gunz, <http://blog.beliefnet.com/yearofsundays/2011/03/the-bridge-a-perfectly-imperfect-christian-experience.html>

creating its own identity, designs its own practices and adapts to constant internal changes in diversity. The Bridge is messy, but it causes me remember the Church in Antioch as the first Greek converts must have struggled amid the cultural conflicts.

HomePDX

HomePDX is the offspring of the Bridge. It was found by Ken Loyd as a church for the homeless in Portland. Soon it morphed into a broader ministry to the homeless of Portland. Ken might be best described as a friend to all people with his broad smile and love for everyone and anyone. Ken lives an intentional life of engaging marginalized people. When you see him with his skeleton and hello Kitty tattoos on his arms along with his gray Mohawk he is not what people conceive in their minds as the typical pastor. Ken is probably the most intuitive and innovative Positive Deviance Approach practitioner I have met so far. His willingness to engage the culture of those he desires to reach by becoming a native with them represents the highest level of respect and honor of a people group I have ever witnessed. Ken is in the process of beginning another ministry amid the “Travelers”²⁶ and turning the leadership of HomePDX over to Bruce Arnold. Bruce has worked along with Ken for several years now and is integrated into the HomePDX community.

HomePDX practices and strategies

The homeless culture, those who live outside, is a broad community consisting of destitute men, women and children and youth who are part of the “unwanted tribe.” The mentally ill and some addicts make up this marginalized people. Ken entered into their

²⁶ Travelers are youth whom travel the country exploring and living off the streets and barrowing couches whenever possible to sleep.

culture by a practice and strategy of developing trust through understanding their culture. Bruce Arnold has followed his example. But Ken has learned the fine and difficult art of bridging cultures. He has learned how to engage the homeless culture from within it. Ken states, "Everybody deserves to be loved." As a PD practitioner Ken has culturally fluidic capabilities. In the eyes of the homeless Ken is a native.

When interviewing Ken he indicated that building trust amid the homeless is all about loving people. He said, "Everyone deserves to be loved." Ken may not have originally coined the phrase, but he certainly lives it out every day. He shared that most outside groups coming into downtown are there with the purpose of evangelizing and not loving people. Ken's Positive Deviance process turns conventional evangelism upon its head and takes away being purpose driven to being people driven. Ken confided that sometimes "there is nothing glamorous about loving people such as alcoholics, but Christ called us to love our neighbor as ourselves." The goal is access of the Gospel through the theological praxis of the love of Christ.

In developing HomePDX Ken employed much of the same practices and strategies used at the Bridge. He integrated into the culture, essentially he went native. He is able to understand the culture better than any of the others ministers reaching out to the house-less in Portland.

Bruce Arnold recently described to me his PD activities. He took a weekend and spent it living on the streets as one of the members of HomePDX. When he addressed the HomePDX community at the gathering on the following Sunday he stated, "I have the utmost respect for anyone who lives on the streets." The community went totally silent and Bruce

wondered if he had said something wrong. A community member told him, “No one ever tells us that they respect us.” Bruce gained clout that day amid the community.

The community of HomePDX has self-identified itself as a church. Ken has never called HomePDX a church, at least not amid the Portland community, but the people who attend do. The community followed the pattern set out in Acts as they navigated creating their own identity as “Christians.” This is further evidence of the PD process in action amid the marginalized. HomePDX has also designed its own practices. It recognizes those from within their midst who are called as pastors. They have developed the practice of ordination from the community. Not an ordination from above, but from below. This designed practice indicates the community’s wisdom and intelligence at recognizing what the Holy Spirit is doing and whom the Spirit calls.

As representative positive deviant practitioners no other group has demonstrated the high level of intuitiveness and counter-intuitiveness as the members of the HomePDX. The team followed the steps of PD process by first, not assuming to have the answers, but understood the community would supply the answers about how to reach them with the Gospel. Second, it was an intuitive venture at the grass roots level where they learned another cultural perspective that allowed them to become one with the tribe. Third, the community had ownership of the practices and strategies put into play and came up with the answers to spreading the Gospel amidst themselves. Fourth, was a recognition that conventional wisdom would not and did not work amongst the tribe of the house-less. Finally, the community was allowed to self-identify and developed self-regulation as well. All of this transpired through PDA leadership that was uninformed of the practices and strategies as Positive Deviance.

HomePDX is achieving ecclesial contextualization of the Gospel amid the homeless and marginalized people of inner city Portland. They are accomplishing this through the use of the Positive Deviance Approach as a way to empower ecclesial contextualization with theological praxis. The descriptive Christology of the Gospel is in full view at the HomePDX. The unconditional love, as exemplified by Christ, is what drives the praxis of HomePDX.

Recommendations

The intent of this paper was to learn if the practices and strategies used by alternative missional ecclesia to engage the Gospel amid marginalized people coincide with the concept of the Positive Deviance Approach. The conclusion has been that the practices and strategies of the alternative missional ecclesia do indeed reflect the Positive Deviance Approach. The realization that the alternative missional ecclesia are practitioners of PD process at varying degrees presents a new approach and process of creating ecclesia not practiced amongst the institutional church. After interviewing and observing the practitioners' within the research group there are some recommendations to delineate for those who are interested in adopting a Positive Deviance Approach.

The following is a delineation of those recommendations for church practitioners who desire to engage the Positive Deviance Approach. The first recommendation of this paper is to prepare for a journey that will challenge all your assumptions concerning ministry and sharing the Gospel. The second recommendation is to read appendix B of this paper, *A Field Guide to Positive Deviance*. Become completely familiar with it and the terminology. The third recommendation is to visit the *Positive Deviance Initiative* website at

<http://www.positivedeviance.org> and become familiar with the narratives of the various applications of the Positive Deviance Approach. These three initial steps will help a person to learn what the characteristics of a practitioner of PD process appear like. Beyond these initial recommendations the following recommendations are for the purpose of fleshing out the PD process in an ecclesial context.

Defrag

Learning new ways of living begins with a change in thinking. This does not resonate with the PD process of *behaving into a new way of thinking*, but since it is most likely from the modernist mindset one is working from we will begin here. This change in thinking requires a time of defragmenting from the prevailing training received in the modernist church planters' boot camps that are present in the institutional church's arsenal.

The term defragment or defrag is a common computer term used in reference to clearing unwanted data and reorganizing the data on a hard drive. In many ways this computer maintenance term is a great metaphor to start this section on recommendations. Just like the hard drive in a computer, a person needs to defragment his or her perspectives, thereby allowing them to take in new information and perspectives. For example, imagine you are with Galileo in the year 1563 C.E. standing together facing the east watching the dawn. Both of you are experiencing the same physical reality; the sun emerging on the horizon to signal the start of a new day. As you watch the sun emerge it becomes obvious that you and Galileo disagree on the interpretation of what you are witnessing. You are part of the medieval worldview that imagines the sun as rising to warm the earth. The earth is the center of the galaxy for you. But Galileo interprets and imagines what he sees as the earth

declining, because the sun is at the center for him, not the earth. It is the same reality just different perspectives. In order to engage the Positive Deviance Approach in the ecclesial context it will require a new perspective that is imaginative and creative. Perspective is a person's reality and the majority of church practitioners do not recognize they are stuck in the Attractional, Propositional and Colonial mode of the institutional church. Just as in medieval times the prevailing perspective was an earth centric universe, so as church practitioners in contemporary culture our way of thinking must be reformatted to a sun centric perspective.

The limitation of a modernist perspective that only views the church and the world in a black and white worldview will greatly hinder any learning that may be accomplished. The movement of the church must be away from a propositional (APC) perspective in order to gain a real presence in contemporary society. The modernist paradigm (the propositional perspective) equation of proposition + knowing = understanding is not within the makeup of the Positive Deviance (PD) process. The PD process turns the modernist paradigm on its head with the equation understanding + knowing = relationship. It is not sufficient to propositionally understand a culture or marginalized people. What is sufficient is for practitioners to engage relationally in order to authentically understand a culture or marginalized people as if they are one with them. The PD process is not about coming into a culture or amid a marginalized people with the answers of what is the best way to reach them with the Gospel. It is actually about coming into a culture or marginalized people and allowing them to indicate what, how and why is the best way to reach them with the Gospel. The ability to interpret culture differently is the result of eliminating modernist assumptions

and applying a new imagination (semiotics)²⁷. The process must first begin with the practitioner through defragging his/her hard drive of the assumptions that will limit one's ability to imagine a different reality filled with a world of incredible colors instead of just black and white.

Incarnational Practices

The modernist mode of thinking is a practice most practitioners find difficult to overcome when learning to engage the PD process. The following activities are about learning to move outside of the modernist paradigm into a real understanding of culture amid marginalized people. When engaging an unfamiliar cultural setting it is best to learn to listen. The first incarnational practice is to listen more than speaking. This is a critical activity in the PD process. The listening process referred to herein involves listening without assuming or judging. It is a listening for the sake of understanding others. It is critical to understand how Christians and church are viewed amid the people being engaged. Listen for the critics, criticisms, complaints, and condemnations of Christians and the church. While listening avoid getting defensive and argumentative, but instead learn why they feel like they do. At all cost do not invalidate their opinions and brush them aside. Their feelings are real and should be respected. As Christ followers we cannot afford to take a position of superiority and diminish the opportunity to connect in culture. There must be a willingness to hear the voice of others and respect their voice. Their voice will give the practitioner significant clues about how best to reach the community with the Gospel.

²⁷ Semiotics – the ability to interpret signs and symbols.

The second incarnational activity involves living amongst a marginalized people. Loyd asked the question, “Can we be one of you?” Living amid people in their culture on their terms allows for a listening that comes naturally and not mechanically or academically. Living amid people allows the practitioner of the PD process to hear more than their words, but allows for watching their faces as they reveal their hearts. The goal of the PD process is to gain an authentic relational understanding of people. It is only when listening is engaged in living amid the culture does a practitioner understand the relationship of what it means to be one with the people.

The third incarnational activity is to learn the language, the slang, and the idioms of the community. The Bible has been through many translations and paraphrases; it is just as important amid the marginalized to speak the Gospel in their terms, even if those terms might be offensive within the institutional church. For many, the action of cultural translation may stretch boundaries of what has been perceived as acceptable limits, but one of the most honoring ways to connect with people is to speak in their language on their terms.

The fourth incarnational activity is to create a contextually open environment where people are accepted and loved as human beings without judging their brokenness, flaws or lifestyles. The focus is upon developing authentic relationships that allows people to experience belonging without believing. People who are interested in Jesus Christ want an authentic experience of Christian spirituality. They are exploring faith and faith experiences in pursuit of a real spirituality that works. They are asking the questions, “Does Christ really make a difference and does your faith really work for you?” A contextually open community is a safe place where people who are exploring faith may belong without believing,

acknowledge their interest and experiment with the Christian faith, experience the Gospel as reality, and experience a community of faith.

The fifth incarnational activity is experiential discipleship. The seeker through the previous four incarnational activities has the opportunity to take a natural step through experiential discipleship. This style of discipleship is fueled through discovery. As the seeker pursues faith, Christ allows the seeker to capture him or her by becoming aware of Christ presence within them. Here the intersection of pursuit and faith become a reality leading to transformation. The transformation must come from Christ work within the seeker through the conforming work of the Holy Spirit to the image of Christ. Note this is not an external conformity to appear as a believer, but an internal conformity to Christ that demonstrates a real transformation. The greatest witness of the Gospel is the incarnational community of Christ followers living amid the cultures and peoples of the world. Leslie Newbigin asserts,

[What occupied] the center of Jesus' concern was the calling and binding to Himself of a living community of men and women who would be the witnesses of what he was and did. The new reality that he introduced into history was to be continued through history in the form of community, not in the form of a book.²⁸

Newbigin's assertion turns things upside right by making the focus of the mission of Christ the community and not the book. Being people of the book does not create community, but being people of Christ does create an authentic faith community. The community of Christ results from living out the Gospel in the world as an incarnational and missional community. The pattern of the contemporary church had been to use the Attractional, Propositional and Colonial (APC) method as described in chapter one. The PD practitioner represents one of

²⁸ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 52.

the greatest assets of the church to bring about transforming the presence of Christ amid marginalized people and people in all cultures throughout the world.

One final recommendation is always be in pursuit of Jesus Christ, recognize how he is already present and active in the lives of all people, and truly love everyone unconditionally. A.J. Swoboda said, “We are not taking Christ to them. He is already present amongst them. We are learning to see where and how Jesus is intersecting with their lives, so that we may connect with them.” Welcome to a new journey and the pursuit of the mission of Christ.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to inspire ecclesial leadership to adopt the Positive Deviance Approach in order to empower ecclesial contextualization of the Gospel with theological praxis amid marginalized people. The four examples brought forward in the research group each illustrate different marginalized cultural contexts and the application of the Positive Deviance Approach. In each case the subjects were uninformed about the PD process, but the practices and strategies they emulated fall within the criterion that defines the Positive Deviance Approach. At least two of four essentials of PD process are identified in each case that reflects the practices and strategies of what happened in the early church in Antioch. Those four essential PD processes were, first, engaging culture from within the culture. Second the community navigates its own identity. Third, the community designs its own practices and fourth, the community adapts to internal diversity.

The Positive Deviance Approach (PDA) as shown in this paper is a method that maybe used for empowering ecclesial contextualization with theological praxis. The PDA is

accomplished through a descriptive Christology that emulates the practices and strategies of Jesus Christ and is supported through the present mission of Christ via the Holy Spirit. Then this paper explored the problem and the context of marginalized people of Portland in relationship to sharing the Gospel in chapter one. The problem of cultural irrelevance is highlighted in light of the modernist (APC) approach of the contemporary church. This paper went on to explore the practices and strategies of Jesus Christ as reflecting the PD process amid the Judaic culture of the first century. The view of this paper is that Christ is the exemplar of all the activities of the church. The primary consideration was how the Gospels present a descriptive Christology for the basis of the theological praxis of the church. Next the paper explored the practices and strategies of the early church as engaging ecclesial contextualization amid the marginalized of the first century, the Gentiles. The observation was that the trajectory of the Gospel was a movement from being contained wholly within a Judaic culture in Jerusalem to emerge as a multicultural ecclesial expression in Antioch. The spread of the Gospel came through the Hellenists as they emulated the theological praxis of Jesus Christ amid culture giving birth to Gentile Christianity. Then this paper explored the theological basis of practicing the PD process amid marginalized people using the models of Jesus Christ and the early church in New Testament as its basis.

Further, this paper explored a research method that was adopted and implemented to study a research group for PD process amid the marginalized in Portland. The four alternative missional ecclesias in the study group demonstrated evidence of practicing the PDA amid marginalized people through some surprising ways. Each ecclesia represented different and yet similar practices and strategies that are being used to create and sustain ecclesia amid marginalized people. The theological praxis of each group found its locus in

the descriptive Christology presented in the New Testament as practiced by Jesus Christ and the early church. By engaging the Positive Deviance Approach, the alternative missional ecclesias were able to succeed where the institutional (APC) church failed to create and sustain an ecclesial community.

The Positive Deviance Approach is a viable approach that applies to ecclesial contexts for the creation and sustaining of genuine Christ honoring alternative missional ecclesia amid marginalized people. Positive Deviance: empowering ecclesial contextualization with theological praxis.

APPENDIX A
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) Tell me the story of how your faith community came into being?
- 2) What led you to begin or participate in your faith community?
- 3) How would you define the most significant problems in your community?
- 4) How is the community able to overcome cultural challenges and barriers?
- 5) You said that you did _____, how were you able to do that?¹
- 6) How would you describe the life of your community?
- 7) What practices and strategies are unique to your community?
- 8) How do you discover or create your community practices and strategies?

¹ The Positive Deviance Initiative, “Basic Field Guide to the Positive Deviance Approach” (Tufts University, September 2010), 13, http://www.positivedeviance.org/resources/manuals_basicguide.html.

APPENDIX B

THE POSITIVE DEVIANCE INITIATIVE

BASIC FIELD GUIDE TO THE POSITIVE DEVIANCE APPROACH

Tufts University, September 2010

www.positivedeviance.org

Basic Field Guide to the Positive Deviance (PD) Approach

Purpose of the Field Guide

This basic guide is to orient newcomers to the PD approach and provide the essential tools to get started. It includes a brief description of basic definitions, as well as the guiding principles, steps, and process characteristics. This guide also includes suggestions of when to use the PD approach, facilitation tips, and outlines possible challenges. These elements will help practitioners implement successful PD projects. Please use this guide as a resource to initiate the PD approach. Its brevity and simplicity are meant to invite curious and intrepid implementers who face complex problems requiring behavioral and social change. It is suitable for those who seek solutions that exist today in their community and enables the practitioner to leverage those solutions for the benefit of all members of the community.

PD is best understood through action and is most effective through practice.

Useful Definitions

The ***PD concept*** is based on the observation that in every community or organization, there are a few individuals or groups whose uncommon but successful behaviors and strategies have enabled them to find better solutions to problems than their neighbors who face the same challenges and barriers and have access to same resources.

The ***PD approach*** is a problem solving, asset-based approach grounded in the fact that communities have assets or resources they haven't tapped. It enables a community or organization to amplify uncommon behaviors or strategies discovered by community members among the least likely to succeed (positive deviants), develop some activities or initiatives based on these findings and measure outcomes. The PD approach brings about sustainable behavioral and social change by identifying solutions already existing in the system.

A ***PD individual*** or group demonstrates special or uncommon behaviors and strategies that enable the person or group to overcome a problem without special resources. However, a person is defined as a PD only in the context of a specific problem.

PD methodology consists of five basic steps (the four D's: define, determine, discover, and design with monitoring and evaluation happening throughout the four Ds). These comprise an iterative road map for the process.

The term "***PD inquiry***" refers to the stage in the process whereby the community seeks to discover demonstrably successful behaviors and strategies among its members.

The term "***PD process***" refers to the entire journey encompassing the skillful use of experiential learning methods and skilled facilitation applied to the four steps of the PD design; it results in community mobilization and ownership, discovery of existing solutions, creation of new networks, and emergence of new solutions as a result of community initiatives.

Guiding Principles of the PD Approach

Remember these basic principles when initiating the PD approach in a community:

- The community owns the entire process.
- All individuals or groups who are part of the problem are also part of the solution and hence the PD process involves all parties who affect the problem. "Don't do anything about me without me."
- The community discovers existing uncommon, successful behaviors and strategies (PD inquiry).
- The community designs ways to practice and amplify successful behaviors and strategies and unleashes innovation.
- Community members recognize that "someone just like me" can get results, even in the worst case scenarios (social proof).
- PD emphasizes practice instead of knowledge—the "how" instead of the "what" or "why." The PD Mantra is: "You are more likely to Act your way into a new way of thinking than to think your way into a new way of acting."
- The community creates its own benchmarks and monitors progress.
- PD process facilitation is based on deep respect for community, its members, and its culture, focuses on interactive engagement, and capacity to let the community lead.

- The PD process expands existing networks and creates new ones.

When to Use Positive Deviance

Positive deviance should be considered as a possible approach when a concrete problem meets the following criteria:

- The problem is not exclusively technical but also relational and requires behavioral or/and social change.
- The problem is complex, seemingly intractable, and other solutions haven't worked.
- Positive deviant individuals or groups exist solutions are possible.
- There is sponsorship and local leadership commitment to address the issue.

Getting Started – Preliminary Steps

The Invitation

Step 1: Leadership Involvement

10 Points for Initial conversations with leadership;

1. Introduction of the PD approach & concept, design & process to sponsors and interested leadership in the organization. Share examples.
2. Explain how the PD approach is different from other asset-based approaches: self-discovery & social proof, ownership and involvement of all stakeholders, focusing on a specific issue in worst case scenario, the people are the experts.
3. Ensure the availability of hard data on the issue.
4. Verify the presence of potential PD individuals, groups (families, tribal, union, staff) or larger entities) within the organization or community (schools, hospitals, villages, region, district, departments, etc.) through secondary data.
5. Get information on the organizational setting.
6. Outline with the leaders potential initial steps: rough description. Stress the importance of extending an INVITATION to potential stakeholders. The leaders can extend the invitation to their constituency by first exploring the issues to which PD can be most appropriately applied (adaptive challenges that require individual behavior and organizational change, (not skill or technology-based problems)*.

7. Who else should be involved? Participants & stakeholders: should include individuals from policy level to front line staff.
8. Discuss where to start to ensure success (experimental or pilot initiatives need to be successful). Required criteria: local champions and committed individuals, strong leadership support, etc.
9. Stress ownership of main stakeholders from day one: staff needs to be the one to identify and define the issue, staff participation is a prerequisite from day one.
10. Discuss potential time frame for impact: behavior & social change. Invite others who are willing, and at times eager, to become involved. Each person is valuable to the process.

* (participants or actors: once potential participants are assembled and the PD concept is described through examples, the local leaders can ask “Does this make sense? If so, is there anyone here who would like to become involved?”)

Step 2: Build a resource team of volunteers that is diverse and includes members of the community as well as local leaders.

Note: this group may vary in number throughout the PD process, as more individuals get involved, and others drop out.

Basic Steps carried out by the community resource team:

As defined earlier, PD methodology consists of five basic steps carried out by members of the community:

1. ***Define*** the problem, current perceived causes, challenges and constraints, common practices, and desired outcomes.
2. ***Determine*** the presence of PD individuals or groups.
3. ***Discover*** uncommon but successful behaviors and strategies through inquiry and observation.
4. ***Design*** activities to allow community members to practice the discovered behaviors.
5. ***Monitor*** and evaluate the resulting project or initiative which further fuels change by documenting and sharing improvements as they occur, and help the community discern the effectiveness of the initiative.

Step 1: The community defines or reframes the problem by:

- Inviting everyone to review or generate data that measures the magnitude of the problem.
- Articulating a desired outcome (both quantitative and qualitative) that is different from the present.
- Exploring the issues impacting the problem and current behavioral norms. Create or use existing conceptual frameworks relating to the problem.
- Conducting discussions with various groups in the community to learn about common practices and normative behaviors – it is important to involve everyone in the community around this discussion to strengthen community awareness and ownership.
- Listing common barriers and challenges related to the problem.
- Identifying all stakeholders who should be involved.
- Identifying human and cultural resources already existing in the community (formal and informal).
- Convening community wide meeting(s) to share the problem, develop the goal, and expose the community to the PD concept via stories from the community.

Sample Tools and activities

- Create or use baseline data through mapping, creating visual scoreboards.
- Develop a simple time line known and agreed to by all.
- Discuss with various groups in the community to learn about normative behaviors, common challenges and obstacles. (Creative dialogues and situational dialogues).
- Using Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) activities such as mapping improvisation, Venn diagrams, transects, prioritizing, wealth ranking, trends, etc most appropriate for the problem at hand.
- Participatory photography and drawing, and other culturally acceptable media.
- Using discovery and action dialogues (DAD).

- Creation of culturally acceptable visuals that illustrate the problem.
- Use of different media to document the above activities to be shared with the community. (Visuals, photography gallery, skits, poems, songs, etc.)
- Involving members of the community in generating or reviewing data that measures the magnitude of the problem.
- Using Participatory learning and action (PLA) DAD activities such as mapping improvisation, Venn diagrams, transects, prioritizing, discovery and action dialogues (DAD) to engage various members of the community.

Step 2: The community determines the presence of positive deviants by:

- Summarizing the current common practices that impact on problem, and the data.
- Identifying individuals, families, or entities in the community who already exhibit successful behaviors or desired outcomes from the data & information gathered from step 1.
- Establishing exclusion criteria—selecting only those individuals or entities that face the same or worse challenges and barriers as others.
- Creating the team that will carry out the PD inquiries.

Sample tools and activities

Analysis of data and information from previous activities for identification of PDs.

- Make a list of exclusion criteria with community members.

Step 3: The community discovers the specific uncommon practices that enable PDs to prevent or solve the identified problem by:

- Enabling peers and community members to design tools for the PD inquiry.
- Conducting a positive deviance inquiry with self selected individuals.
- Compile and document the findings.
- Applying exclusion criteria for discovered behaviors and strategies, selecting only those individuals or entities that face the same or worse challenges and barriers as others and have no extra resources (separating out the TBUs “True, But Useless.”)

- Identifying the PD practices, strategies, and behaviors.
- Vetting the results with the whole community.

Note: This step can be repeated many times during the life of the project. It may also become a feature of inquiry in the community for other problems.

Sample Tools or activities: (as informal as possible)

- Group work to develop In-depth interviews bullet points (not a questionnaire).
- Making an observation check-list for guided observations.
- Logistics for On-site visits.
- Discovery and action dialogues.
- Community feedback sessions (see www.positivedeviance.org for examples of PD inquiry tools).
- Creative and interactive illustrations of PD behaviors and strategies (skits, photo-montage, theatre, displays, improvisation, etc.).
- Community feedback sessions

[See the Website, www.positivedeviance.org, for examples of PD inquiry tools]

Step 4: The community designs and develops activities to expand the PD solutions by:

- Developing a plan of action based on the PD inquiries findings that include: What, Whom, With Whom, How, For how long, Where, etc.
- Designing activities that enable people to practice the behaviors and strategies identified during the PD inquiry and vetted by the community.
- These can be multi-targeted and multi-level.
- Creating opportunities to practice and “learn through doing” in a safe environment with peer support.
- Using imaginative approaches to involve the community in the work (e.g. feeding workshops in Vietnam, Healthy Baby Fairs in Pakistan.)

Sample tools or activities for designing opportunities for community members to practice the discovered behaviors and strategies

- Community meeting to share PD inquiry findings, vet the information and get galvanized to solve the problem making sure that the leadership is involved.
- Creation of an action team involving the resource team and self-selected volunteers who have participated in the process.
- Develop an action plan; Pin down roles and responsibilities.
- Integrate activities with existing resources and activities already accessed in the community.

Step 5: The community measures, monitors, and evaluates the effectiveness of its initiatives based on the PD findings by:

- Developing a way to monitor progress of initiative.
- Making the data real by engaging the community in developing its own indicators to monitor progress (quantitative and qualitative indicators of behavioral and social change).
- Creating culturally appropriate ways to communicate the data to the community as a whole.
- Evaluating its initiatives at regular, frequent intervals.
- Sharing the initiative's impact with others.

As the PD project evolves and a successful outcome emerges in the community, other communities and groups will hear and will want to apply this approach (Success driven).

Suggestions for dissemination might include:

- Documenting, evaluating, and sharing results.
- Honoring and amplifying the success stories by storytelling.

- Enabling the community members to tell their stories and coach others within their networks.
- Creating a Living University for other communities to discover how the PD process could help them solve the same problem.
- Reflecting on what worked best.

Characteristics of the PD Process

The PD process promotes behavioral and social change because it is:

- Leverage innovations coming from the community, community members generated.
- Engages multiple stakeholders in applying the discovered existing PD behaviors and strategies.
- Starting small to demonstrate success.
- Connects people or groups who haven't connected before.
- Targets the widest range of appropriate community members.
- Creates opportunities to practice and “learn through doing” in a safe environment with peer support.
- Uses existing resources and assets purposely and extensively.
- Uses multi channel, multi target culturally appropriate communication strategies.

Tips for PD Facilitators

- Tap the expertise in the group (To repeat: the people in the community are the experts.)
- Ensure the participants talk more than you do. Encourage them to exchange stories and information among themselves.
- Refrain from making suggestions or giving advice (unless repeatedly asked).

- Ask open-ended questions (e.g. what, how, what if?) (Avoid questions that elicit yes or no answers.)
- Don't try to exercise control; let the group guide the conversation.
- Invite participants to tell their stories or share their experiences about the issue at hand. Tap into emotions.
- Make the process personal and fun.
- Share relevant personal experience with participants to make them feel comfortable. Develop trust by admitting your own vulnerability.
- Let silence speak! (Pause for twenty seconds after asking a question. That's long enough to sing happy birthday!).
- Stay with the questions. Don't press for quick fixes. Insights often come when one is least expecting them.
- Support a climate where speaking the truth is OK, even when doing so may make the facilitator or a participant look foolish, confused, or unprepared.
- Believe that there will be enough time. "Go fast by going slow."
- Commit to learn, to be influenced, to be personally changed by the experience.

The Art of Asking Questions

For the most thoughtful and revealing responses, use open ended questions that ask what, how, why, why now? Here are some examples of what you might ask or say in specific situations to facilitate or refocus discussions.

To spur continued reflection and thinking within the group you might ask;

- To answer your question, let me ask a question.
- Can I ask you a question about your question?
- I have a question for you.

To generate more interactive discussion among the group:

- Who can answer this question?
- Who wants to answer this question?
- Who has any idea about this?
- How would anyone here answer this question?

To involve more stakeholders, ask:

- Whose problem is it?
- Who else should be involved?
- How might we involve them?

To uncover or identify PD individuals or groups:

Are there any groups of individuals who have overcome (or prevented) the problem?

Turn the question back to the group (use the somersault question):

- So if I understand correctly, nobody here is [or has achieved] X?
- So, there are no people in your community who has overcome this problem?

Once the group realizes that PDs actually exist in their own community, then follow up with some direct questions such as;

- How can we learn from them?
- When is a good time to meet with them?

To discover PD behaviors and strategies, ask probing questions:

- You said that you did X; how were you able to do that?

- Most other people have had problems with X and Y; how have you been able to overcome them?
- Many people have explained to us how difficult it is to do X because of busy schedules, high costs, conflict with community customs or traditions, etc. I was wondering what you do to overcome these barriers or challenges encountered by others in your community?
- How are you able to overcome these common challenges and barriers?
- Can you show us how?
- What do you do when X problem happens or you are faced by the challenge of Y?
- Encourage participants to repeat what they've heard or understood to get more specificity: "So, if I understand correctly, you do X only during the day) you do not do Y at all during the day or night.
- Do you know other individuals like you?

To help define or target actions to be taken:

- What are our next steps?
- Who is going to do what?
- What will it take to accomplish this?

To ask permission to make a suggestion:

- Would it be possible for . . . ?
- You are the experts, but would it make sense if . . . ?

Minimum Specifications to classify a project as a "Positive Deviance" project

A Positive Deviance project promotes community ownership and sustained behavioral and social change. A project may be considered a "PD project" if it meets the following ten criteria:

1. All stakeholders/ a diverse group of community members are involved in the five steps:
 - 1) **Define** the problem, current perceived causes, challenges and constraints, common practices, and desired outcomes.
 - 2) **Determine** the presence of positive deviant individuals or groups in the community.
 - 3) **Discover** uncommon but successful practices and strategies through inquiry and observation.
 - 4) **Design** activities to allow community members to practice the discovered behaviors.
 - 5) **Monitor** and evaluate the resulting project or initiative which further fuels change by documenting and sharing improvements as they occur, and help the community discern the effectiveness of the initiative.
2. The community carries out the five iterative steps (see above).
3. The facilitator(s) do not make the discovery of findings nor do they control the process.
4. The PD inquiry is carried out by community members and vetted by community members.
5. The inquiry findings are explicit and behavior based (not value-based, or dependent on the individual traits of positive deviants). The findings should not focus so much on **WHAT** the positive deviant practices are, but about **HOW** the behavior of the positive deviants (individuals or groups) enables them to overcome or prevent the problem at hand.
6. The plan of action is developed by the community and based on each of the inquiry findings.
7. The initiative is practice-oriented, multi-channeled and multi-targeted, and utilizes existing human resources and networks.
8. The community develops its own monitoring and evaluation plan, including the creation of their own tools for doing so.

9. Feedback loops are developed to keep the community informed and enable members to participate and innovate.
10. The community members are able to explain how they have been able to solve the problem and provide specific examples of behavior and social change directly linked to the PD inquiry and the inquiry-informed initiative.

Tell us about Your Project

The Positive Deviance Initiative (PDI) would love to hear about your project.

Please send us the following information:

Name of your organization

Contact information

Name of the project

Location of the project

Problem statement

Discovered behaviors/strategies

Project impact

Population impacted by the project

Special target group

Explain how your project meets the ten minimum specifications outlined above.

Any documentation that might be shared on our website (stories, videos, photos, reports, articles, etc.)

Send this information to:

contact@positivedeviance.org

or

Positive Deviance Initiative

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USA

The Positive Deviance Initiative greatly appreciates your participation in documenting the ways the PD approach is being implemented worldwide.

This guide was developed by the Positive Deviance Initiative. For more information, go to our Web site at <http://www.positivedeviance.org>.¹

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