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# The Buzz about the Church: Re-Imagining Discipleship through a Theology of Beekeeping

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

THE BUZZ ABOUT THE CHURCH:  
RE-IMAGINING DISCIPLESHIP THROUGH A THEOLOGY OF BEEKEEPING

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY  
MATTHEW TODD THOMAS

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George Fox Evangelical Seminary  
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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DMin Dissertation

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This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by  
the Dissertation Committee on February 17, 2015  
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics and Future Studies.

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In Honor and Memory of my Beekeeping Family  
Arthur Banta, Cliff Thomas, Arthur Thomas

In Honor of the next Generation of Beekeepers  
Christina, Noah and Emma Thomas

## WRITTEN STATEMENT

### SECTION 1: CHURCH COLLAPSE DISORDER (CCD)

#### INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the twentieth century membership in the North American church has fallen drastically. A loss in membership and attendance has created a “Buzz about the Church.” According to findings by George Barna, in one decade the unchurched population has increased from twenty-four to thirty-four percent.<sup>1</sup> Noting the trend, various authors and theologians offer their reasons. In *Pilgrim Practices: Discipleship for a Missional Church*, Kristopher Norris tells us “for years pastors, pollsters, and academics have been signaling the death of the church, or at least the death of the church as we know it. Church attendance in most North American denominations is plummeting.”<sup>2</sup> In a recent lecture, Professor William Abraham outlined four key issues that the church in North America must come to terms with: “Sexuality and marriage, development of aggressive secularism, decline of Protestantism, challenge of Islam.”<sup>3</sup> All of these cultural issues, including the decline of Protestantism, are challenges the church is going to have to engage within the next several decades.” A 2001 Survey reported in the Christian Science Monitor reveals that the number of Americans who have “no

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<sup>1</sup> George Barna, *The State of the Church* (Ventura, CA: Issachar Resources, 2002), 17.

<sup>2</sup> Kristopher Norris, *Pilgrim Practices: Discipleship for a Missional Church* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), Kindle location 140.

<sup>3</sup> William Abraham, “Billy Abraham on Engaging the Culture,” John Meunier blog, August 2, 2013, accessed September 1, 2013, <http://johnmeunier.wordpress.com/2013/08/02/billy-abraham-on-engaging-the-culture/>.



religious preference” has doubled from 1990 to 2001, reaching 14 percent of the population.”<sup>4</sup>

Based on a December 2010 Barna Group survey there were six major themes which emerged to give evidence to nontransmission of the Christian faith. Three of the themes outlined by the Barna Group that are important for this research were: “The Christian church is becoming less theologically literate, Christians are becoming more ingrown and less outreach-oriented, and the influence of Christianity on culture and individual lives is largely invisible.”<sup>5</sup> Researcher Thom Rainer supports Barna Group’s finding with his own and suggests “the number one reason for the decline in church attendance is that members attend with less frequency than they did just a few years ago.”<sup>6</sup> Reduced frequency in attendance will contribute to biblical and theological illiteracy, fewer operational and missional resources, and reduced missional presence. “A new study by the Barna Group conducted among 16- to 29-year-olds shows that a new generation is more sceptical of and resistant to Christianity than were people of the same age just a decade ago.”<sup>7</sup> In the same study Barna revealed “Common negative perceptions include that present-day Christianity is judgmental (87%), hypocritical (85%), old-

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<sup>4</sup> Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), Kindle location 277.

<sup>5</sup> “2010,” Barna Group, accessed September 5, 2014, <https://www.barna.org/culture-articles/462-six-megathemes-emerge-from-2010>

<sup>6</sup> “The Number One Reason for the Decline in Church Attendance and Five Ways to Address It,” Thom S. Rainer, last modified August 19 2013, accessed September 5, 2014, <http://thomrainer.com/2013/08/19/the-number-one-reason-for-the-decline-in-church-attendance-and-five-ways-to-address-it/>

<sup>7</sup> “A New Generation Expresses its Skepticism and Frustration with Christianity,” Barna Millennials, last modified Sept. 24, 2007, accessed September 15, 2014, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials/94-a-new-generation-expresses-its-skepticism-and-frustration-with-christianity#.VBMhHT-YbIU>

fashioned (78%), and too involved in politics (75%)—representing large proportions of young outsiders who attach these negative labels to Christians.”<sup>8</sup>

Scholar and historian Leonard Sweet also observes deficits and unhealthiness in the modern church. Sweet claims, “We are likely the last generation to be familiar with the Christian story and for whom churches have cultural significance. And you will die, leaving behind a culture for whom the Christian story will be completely unknown.”<sup>9</sup> Whether Sweet’s prophesy will come to pass is, of course, yet to be determined. What is clear, according to Sweet, is the church’s impact and significance in the culture is deteriorating.

John Wesley, founder of the eighteenth century Methodist movement, observed about his church what we observe about ours. He once noted, “I am not afraid that the people called Methodist should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case unless they hold fast to the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out.”<sup>10</sup>

Wesley, an Anglican priest in the Church of England, saw firsthand that a church that loses its “doctrine, spirit and discipline”<sup>11</sup> dies. He feared they would end up like the Church of England having religion without the power. It was always Wesley’s intention to renew the Church of England. Unfortunately, his hope didn’t come to pass. Instead, a

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<sup>8</sup> Barna Millennials.

<sup>9</sup> Leonard Sweet, *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and the Church* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook Publishers, 2009), Kindle location 238.

<sup>10</sup> John Wesley, “Thoughts Upon Methodism,” *The Form and Power of Religion: John Wesley on Methodist Vitality*, (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 1.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

movement emerged that eventually formed the Methodist Episcopal Church in Baltimore, Maryland in 1784.

A metaphor from the natural world may help us understand the sickness of the modern North American church and diagnose the influences that have contributed to its collapse—the honeybee and the practice of beekeeping. Like scholars and pastors, beekeepers are experiencing decline in their hive populations due to a condition called Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD).

The winter of 2006/2007 witnessed large-scale losses of managed honey bee (*Apis mellifera* L.) colonies in the United States [1]. Those losses continued into the winter of 2007/2008 [2]. In the U. S. , a portion of the dead and dying colonies were characterized *post hoc* by a common set of specific symptoms: (1) the rapid loss of adult worker bees from affected colonies as evidenced by weak or dead colonies with excess brood populations relative to adult bee populations (Figure 1); (2) a noticeable lack of dead worker bees both within and surrounding the affected hives; and (3) the delayed invasion of hive pests (e. g. , small hive beetles and wax moths) and kleptoparasitism from neighboring honey bee colonies [3]. Subsequently, this syndrome has been termed Colony Collapse Disorder, or CCD.”<sup>12</sup>

Bees are stressed beyond their limits because of natural predators, diseases, migration, and poisons. Beekeepers return to their colonies and find them collapsed. What remains is a queen and very few bees. Although honeybee populations and honey production have been in decline for years, only recently has the condition been diagnosed as Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD). While much of the disorder remains a mystery, strong indicators point to toxins as the ultimate killer. Several researchers observed that the loss of honeybee populations through CCD “involves an interaction between pathogens and other stress factors.”<sup>13</sup> Colonies weakened by pathogens and stress factors

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<sup>12</sup> Dennis vanEngelsdorp, et al. (2009) “Colony Collapse Disorder: A Descriptive Study,” *PLOS ONE* 4(8): e6481 (August 3, 2009) accessed January 1, 2014, doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0006481.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

experience a rise of kleptoparasitism.” A kleptoparasite is an animal that steals food or prey from another animal.”<sup>14</sup>

The church in North America has experienced similar catastrophic losses and influences. Like honeybee colonies, our churches have experienced collapse due to cultural stresses, spiritual toxins, and changes. Throughout the remainder of this document, this condition will be referred to as Church Collapse Disorder.

Colony Collapse Disorder breaks down the highly structured and social dimensions of a hive and keeps the colony from its mission of foraging for food and raising their young. Likewise, Church Collapse Disorder keeps us from fulfilling our mission to hand over our faith to the next generations. Dr. William Abraham notes this collapse and observes what the decline of Protestantism “brings home to him is the crucial inability to hand over the faith from one generation to the next.”<sup>15</sup> Professors Kenda Creasy Dean, William Abraham, Leonard Sweet, the late C. S. Lewis, and a host of other scholars identify this as the pivotal issue for the church—passing the Christian faith on to the next generation.<sup>16</sup> They suggest the church has lost its way, and at the heart of the matter, has developed an identity crisis. The problem addressed here is the failure of the church to transmit the faith because it is collapsing on itself. Why is the church collapsing?

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<sup>14</sup> “Kleptoparasite,” Amateur Entomologists Society, accessed October 1, 2014, <http://www.amentsoc.org/insects/glossary/terms/kleptoparasite>

<sup>15</sup> Abraham, “Billy Abraham on Engaging the Culture,” John Meunier blog.

<sup>16</sup> The inclusion of these prominent theologians is meant to give weight to the argument. Kenda Creasy Dean has authored a book entitled *Almost Christian* and in this book shares her discovery that modern teenagers are being handed a religion called Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. William Abraham is the Albert Outler Chair of Wesley Studies at Perkins School of Theology and has lectured and written extensively on the transmission of the faith. Leonard Sweet is also a United Methodist Scholar and has authored numerous books dealing with transmission of the faith. C.S. Lewis published numerous essays, one of which is *The Transmission of Christianity*. Lewis’ Essay can be found in the book *God in the Dock*.

In the sections that follow we will be inspecting the colony of the church and shedding light on the influences that have contributed to its difficulty in transmitting the Christian faith. Identifying the influences which contributed to the decline of the North American Protestant church will also aid us in discovering what was lost.

### **Gnosticism**

Gnosticism is a formidable influence that has had unimaginable and unquantified impact on the church and hampered its ability to transmit the faith. “Gnosticism describes a collection of ancient religions whose adherents shunned the material world created by the demiurge and embraced the spiritual world.”<sup>17</sup> It “was an amorphous movement during the early church period which featured complex views that focused on the quest for secret knowledge transmitted only to the enlightened and marked by the view that matter is evil. Gnostics denied the humanity of Jesus. Secret knowledge could free the elect from the limits of the world and enable them to return home to the Kingdom of light.”<sup>18</sup> Gnostics believe that salvation from the material world comes from knowing. In their doctrine “The spirit represents the divine spark, a tiny piece of the eternal light smothered under layers of darkness and emotion. Restrained by the life of the flesh, the spirit within us is asleep, unconscious, ignorant of its true identity.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> On the complexity of gnosticism, see Larry W. Hurtado (2005). *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing. pp. 519–561.

<sup>18</sup> Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theological Terms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 114.

<sup>19</sup> Ted Peters, “Post-modern Religion,” *Currents In Theology And Mission* 10, no. 5 (October 1, 1983): 261-272. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed May 29, 2014), 264.

During Verge 2012, a conference that addressed missional community practices, the idea of Gnosticism was noted as the prevalent discipleship model for the modern church. Somehow the church, broadly speaking, adopted the practice of disciple making by seating persons in a classroom and teaching them the core components of Christianity and Bible fluency. Jesus didn't model that type of discipleship, yet it is the common method for making disciples of Jesus Christ today.

At Verge 2010, Jeff Vanderstelt and Caesar Kalinowski compared the way the modern church makes disciples with what Jesus modeled. Jesus said in the gospel of John, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (Jn 8:31-32). Jesus believed that in following him, his disciples would learn the truth, and it would set them free. Caesar Kalinowski said he had been taught and pastored much differently. He writes, "I was taught that you got led in the magic Jesus prayer and then you were disciplined. Jesus demonstrated and told us the exact opposite."<sup>20</sup> The Son of God did not force persons to believe with the promise that afterward he would disciple them. Only by following Jesus would the disciples know the truth that would "set them free."

In their evaluation of the church, Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim insist that "we are perfectly designed to achieve what we are currently achieving—the fruit of the tree speaks volumes about the nature of the tree itself. If we remove action from the equation

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<sup>20</sup> Jeff Vanderstelt and Caesar Kalinowski, "Gospel-centered Missional Communities" (video of lecture, Verge Network, February 2010), accessed March 2, 2012, <http://vimeo.com/15578111>.

of learning, we end up with an academic understanding of the faith and little by way of genuine discipleship.”<sup>21</sup>

While Hirsch and Catchim’s aim was to bring to light the church’s negligence in discipleship praxis, they inadvertently reveal the gnostic influence currently modeled by the church. Evidence suggests Gnosticism as a worldview crept into the church with “possible gnostic influence in the New Testament itself.”<sup>22</sup> Its influence has altered the theological trajectory of the church and reduced Christianity, in the North American context, to an academic playground. The basic idea of Gnosticism is articulated below:

All the various expressions of gnostic thought appear to have evinced a radically dualistic attitude that identified “spirit” as fundamentally good and “matter” as fundamentally “evil.” Thus, the physical world in general and individual human bodies in particular were understood to be material prisons in which divine souls or spirits had been trapped. The most prevalent form of Gnosticism known to us held that the world was created by an evil god called the Demiurge. Human beings are basically eternal spirits that were captured by the Demiurge and confined in bodies of flesh and in a world of matter. Gnostic Christians believed that Christ had come as a spiritual redeemer (disguised as a human being) to enable the enlightened to be liberated from their material existence and to realize their true identities as spiritual beings.<sup>23</sup>

Gnostics understand Jesus as the great revealer, not sin bearer. The material “flesh” is seen in negative connotations by Gnostics and something that binds the divine essence that is within us. Knowledge, then, sets us free from the material binding. Undoubtedly, the influence of evil flesh resonates with many Christians, even in the light of the incarnation. Bruce Schweigerdt observes “such assumptions present some tremendous theological problems in such areas as the doctrine of creation and the doctrine of the

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<sup>21</sup> Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2012), 47.

<sup>22</sup> Alan Richardson and John Bowdler, eds. *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1983), 229.

<sup>23</sup> *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (Revised and Updated), s.v. “Gnat,” (New York: HarperCollins, 2011).

person of Jesus Christ, but especially affects a person's view of life and the way life is lived. For since the body is matter, it therefore is evil."<sup>24</sup>

"Gnosticism in the past has often been characterized as bizarre and even perverse, a distortion of Christian theology."<sup>25</sup> Beyond the obvious contamination of the ideas of Gnosticism intermingled with Christian doctrine lies an important question—why would any person or group adopt such odd belief systems? The answer to that question has been articulated beautifully by Walter Elwell and Barry Beitzel. They write:

Perhaps one of the greatest problems for the uninitiated readers of Gnosticism is understanding the purpose of the Gnostic myths. The myths often seem so strange that the readers are tempted to scratch their heads and wonder how anyone with any intelligence could believe such wild stories. One must realize, however, that the myth writers were seeking to communicate elements of the unexplained relationships between the human and the divine.

The bondage of evil in the world and its relationship to a good god has stretched the minds of the greatest theologians and philosophers of history. The Gnostics devised their answer to the problem of evil by shifting the blame from this world back to either God himself or to divisions within the divine realm. By compartmentalizing good and evil, it was possible to decide one's destiny by the alignments one made.<sup>26</sup>

The accepted beliefs of Gnosticism, no matter how unbelievable they appear, are theological attempts to reconcile a good God with the obvious evil in the world. Antidotally, a return to teaching sound Christian doctrine, raising awareness of Gnostic influence, and immersing the church in incarnational ministry would be steps in the right direction.

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<sup>24</sup> Bruce Schweigerdt, "The Gnostic Influence on Psychology: Effects of the Common Heresy," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 10, no. 3 (1982): 221-229. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost*, accessed May 29, 2014, 222.

<sup>25</sup> Richardson and Bowded, *Westminster Dictionary*, 27.

<sup>26</sup> Walter Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 875.



## Enlightenment

One of the most profound systemic influences on church and culture has been the Enlightenment, also known as the Age of Reason. "The period of modern history known as the *Enlightenment* began in the late seventeenth century and dominated the eighteenth and much of the nineteenth centuries in Europe. It was rooted in Dutch and German rationalism, particularly Benedict Spinoza's rationalistic and antisupernatural work, *Tractatus Theologico-politicus, Tractatus Politicus* (1670)."<sup>27</sup> As a period that awakened reason and elevated it to a status never before imagined, its influence altered numerous continents. "The Enlightenment was an intellectual movement that stressed reason as the way to truth, a world based on perfectly ordered natural laws and a self-confident and optimistic belief in human ability to make progress. The epoch is also frequently called the Age of Reason because reason was understood to be the path to providing the true understanding of man, society, the world and God."<sup>28</sup> William Faulkner once observed, "the past is never dead. It's not even past."<sup>29</sup> The influence of the Enlightenment is not dead, but still very present.

Missiologist Alan Hirsch explains the influence of the Enlightenment:

For all its failings, the church, up till the time of the Enlightenment, played the overwhelmingly dominate role in the mediation of identity, meaning, purpose, and community for at least the preceding eleven centuries in the West. Its demise, or rather its forced removal, came about when two or three other major forces were on the rise. They were:

1. The rise of capitalism and of the free market as the mediator of value.

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<sup>27</sup> Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, (Baker Reference Library. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 213.

<sup>28</sup> Daniel G.Reid, et al, *Dictionary of Christianity in America*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 1.

<sup>29</sup> William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*, (New York: Ransom House, 1950), 92.

2. The rise of the nation state as the mediator of protection and provision.
3. The rise of science as the mediator of truth and understanding.”<sup>30</sup>

Hirsch concludes by saying, “By the time we got to the mid-twentieth century, these forces had all but completely replaced the church in our culture.”<sup>31</sup> Every indication suggests Hirsch’s evaluation is correct. Another source affirms that the Enlightenment “adherents distrusted all authority and tradition in matters of intellectual inquiry, and believed that truth could be attained only through reason, observation, and experiment.”<sup>32</sup>

Leonard Sweet once noted, “Christians are reaping what we have sowed since the Enlightenment, when Christianity reframed the faith as something that can be conceptually argued and proved as a hypothesis. Propositional Christianity has provided most of the powder shot for the antichurch brigade.”<sup>33</sup> The Enlightenment’s most significant influence was its insistence that faith in Jesus Christ could be conceptually argued and proven. In essence, the Enlightenment changed the theological aim of the church. The goal became to prove a faith that was never meant to be proved. The emphasis shifted from nurturing relationships to providing warrants for our claims.

As Hirsch correctly observed the church had the dominant voice until the Enlightenment. This argument suggests that perhaps the pre-Enlightenment voice of the Church was inadequate and needed to be called into question. The church’s historical interpretation of the Bible was mediated by the church itself and unintelligible to many. “Eighteenth-century Germany was the birthplace of the Enlightenment, and also where it

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<sup>30</sup> Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids MI: Brazos Press, 2006), Kindle location 1387.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> F.L. Cross, and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 550.

<sup>33</sup> Sweet, *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and the Church*, Kindle location 2006.

had its greatest impact. This philosophy led to the widespread rejection of both supernatural revelation and the belief that man is sinful.”<sup>34</sup> The late Gordon Spykman, former Professor of Religion and Theology at Calvin College, once noted the influence of the Enlightenment in a lecture that, “basically liberalism and fundamentalism both share a common worldview, arising out of the Enlightenment.”<sup>35</sup>

As a result of the church’s abuses and narrow thinking, Enlightenment thinking emerged. While a strong case can be made that the Enlightenment crippled the church, the movement also brought about necessary changes. The church found itself having to answer for its deepest theological commitments. It had held the culture hostage by its theological stances and political influence. Now it was being challenged. The most significant challenge for the church was the undermining of its hermeneutical positions.

During the Reformation, Luther and others challenged the church at the very core of its practices and beliefs. Luther’s intended outcome was to correct the abuses of the church. The unintended consequences of the Reformation “ushered in Western modernity, with its separation of church and state, secularization of public politics, privatization of religion, freedom of religious beliefs and worship. Yet a genealogical approach can illuminate aspects of the Reformation that continue to influence the present but have remained largely unrecognized.”<sup>36</sup> Brad Gregory argues “that ideological and

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<sup>34</sup> Sharon Rusten with E. Michael E. *The Complete Book of When & Where in the Bible and Throughout History* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2005), 290.

<sup>35</sup> Gordon Spykman, “Fundamentalism in the CRC: A Critique” (lecture at the Christian Reformed Ministers Conference, Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa, April 9, 1985).

<sup>36</sup> Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How Religious Revolution Secularized Society*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), Kindle location 91.

institutional shifts that occurred five or more centuries ago remain substantively necessary to an explanation of why the Western world today is as it is.”<sup>37</sup>

The church has a history of responding to the theological or cultural climate of the day. A reactionary church loses sight of the Christian narrative as it focuses on the controversy of the day and overlooks or intentionally dismisses other matters worthy of discussion. An analysis of the Enlightenment’s effects suggests that when the church is challenged at its deepest core and all its theological, methodological, and doctrinal commitments are brought into focus and criticism, the church can recover its true story and sacred mission to transmit the gospel to the world. In his seminal work, Gregory concludes that the Reformation had unintended consequences. ”Modernity is failing partly because reason alone in modern philosophy has proven no more capable than Scripture alone of discerning or devising consensually persuasive answers to the Life Questions.”<sup>38</sup> Gregory claims that a conceivable methodology which attempted to answer life questions by only appealing to Scripture alone, reason alone, or tradition alone is inadequate to answer the most important questions humans face.

The Enlightenment, like Gnosticism, continues to have enormous impact on the church today. The Enlightenment’s legacy is the church’s continuing failure to pass on its “identity, purpose, mission and community.”<sup>39</sup> The church has been limping along ever since.

Gregory identifies a related influence that has contributed to the nontransmission of the Christian faith when he writes,

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<sup>37</sup> Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 102.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, Kindle location 5517.

<sup>39</sup>Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, Kindle location 1387.

Most visibly in recent decades, this dissolution owed and continues to owe much to the liquefying effects of capitalism and consumerism on the politically protected individuals within liberal states, as men and women in larger numbers prioritize the fulfillment of their self-chosen, acquisitive, individual desires above any social (including familial) solidarities except those they happen to choose, and only for as long as they happen to choose them.<sup>40</sup>

The real effect of the Reformation and by extension the Enlightenment has been the deterioration of accountable community and relationships. Consumerism has perpetuated the loss of community and replaced it with individualized priorities.

### **Consumerism**

One of the most significant influences on the Western church is undoubtedly consumerism. Born out of Enlightenment ideals, consumerism became the “mediator of value.”<sup>41</sup> Any assessment or diagnosis of current realities of both church and culture will have to take this influence into consideration. If Luther’s rebellion leads ultimately to the Enlightenment period and out of that period capitalism is born, one could say, then, inadvertently, the Protestant Reformation is responsible for consumerism. Alan Hirsch, missional community spokesperson and former advertiser points out that as modern church members:

We have been profoundly disciplined every day by a very sophisticated system called media and advertisement. The goal of which is to create desire. Anyone who comes to Jesus in a Western context is already a well disciplined consumer, and it is a religion! Consumerism is defined by what we consume. It is the search for meaning, identity, purpose, and belonging tied to the consumption of products. Consumerism is the alternative religion of our day. You can’t build a church on

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<sup>40</sup> Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 5531.

<sup>41</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, Kindle location 1387.

consumerism. They will desert you at a moment's notice because they have no commitments beyond their own needs.<sup>42</sup>

The goal of media and advertisement is to create desire so people will consume products in the hope that consumption will bring them meaning, clarify their identities, fill them with purpose, and give them connection or belonging. Vincent Beresford notes “consumerism has saturated and centered itself in our culture in the United States. Consumerism now shapes how we think about everything, including religion. Consumers feel ‘entitled’ to have options, getting exactly what they want, and have become consumed with immediate gratification.”<sup>43</sup> Consequently, consumerism has done more to rob people of meaning, purpose, identity, and belonging. Catherine Wallace observes, “The problem is a rootless society structurally dependent in a variety of ways upon ever-escalating levels of material acquisition at the expense of human happiness, community, and moral significance. The authors adeptly and repeatedly acknowledge that various religious traditions warn against what has become the American way of life.”<sup>44</sup>

Wendy Tremayne, creator of Swap-O-Rama-Rama, says, “There is no creativity in consumerism. Branding is a huge part of our culture and divides humanity into socio-economic stalls. The consumer is largely asked to express their uniqueness by being selectors. Makers don’t make good consumers. The less you know, the less you make, the

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<sup>42</sup> Alan Hirsch, “Disciple-Making,” (video, Verge Conference, Austin, TX, 2010), accessed February, 2012, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=NN3oA5AETuI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NN3oA5AETuI)

<sup>43</sup> Vincent Beresford, *Becoming Fully Human: Re-Imagining Christian Discipleship for an Emerging Generation* (DMin diss., George Fox Evangelical Seminary, 2010), 183.

<sup>44</sup> Catherine M. Wallace, “Consumerism and Christian Community,” *Anglican Theological Review* 85, no. 3 (June 1, 2003): 581-588. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed May 29, 2014), 582.

more you buy.”<sup>45</sup> Creativity, according to Tremayne, is stifled by consumption. Instead of creating, we simply become selectors of goods and services. A loss of creativity is a loss of imagination. For creativity has its source in imagination.<sup>46</sup>

Visitors who come to the church on Sunday are usually selectors. They are shopping for meaning, purpose, identity, and connection. We give them exactly what they desire—from relevant worship styles to bells-and-whistles programs. In response to the market demand and fear of declining numbers, the church has adopted a seeker-sensitive/attractional model. Under this model, the church views persons as “market shares.”<sup>47</sup> Such an approach also ignites a competition between most churches.<sup>48</sup> In the attractional model, the catchphrase is “come and see.” The selectors who come to see what the church has to offer are looking to receive much in exchange for little commitment or accountability. Mike Breen, author and creator of 3DM, a missional movement originating in the United Kingdom, states, “When there isn’t challenge, it creates an easy culture where we service our clients. A gimmicks culture continues to want more gimmicks. What if we are low on invitation and high on challenge? It becomes all about the challenge and nothing about the invitation.”<sup>49</sup> He concludes by saying there is normally a high turnover in the gimmicks culture because the invitation is

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<sup>45</sup> Wendy Tremayne, “Making Vs. Consuming: A Conversation with Wendy Tremayne” Swap-O-Rama-Rama, July 19, 2007, accessed March 8, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9t10W4FxRnI>.

<sup>46</sup> Eric Liu and Scott Noppe-Brandon, *Imagination First: Unlocking the Power of Possibility* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2009), Kindle location 400.

<sup>47</sup> Mark Driscoll, “Seeker Vs. Missional—Part One,” *Desiring God*, July 8, 2006, accessed April 5, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Gi0jWNAe6M>.

<sup>48</sup> Abraham, John Menuier blog.

<sup>49</sup> Mike Breen, “Practicals for Disciplining People Like Jesus Did” (presentation at Verge 2012, Austin, Texas, February 29, 2012).

hard to sustain. Clients will simply move on to another gimmicky church that offers what they want.

The consumeristic and attractional model is a departure from the gospel. If sources are right, then what emerge are shallow, attractional, gimmick-obsessed, and me-centered Christians whose primary concern is to fulfill their own privatized needs. This result is no fault of the culture but of the church for weakening its stance, watering down its gospel message, and scrapping its methodology.

Alan and Debra Hirsch, in their book *Untamed*, call the church to return to true discipleship. They write, “The fact that discipleship in the church is considered a somewhat lost art ought to disturb us profoundly.”<sup>50</sup> They also define more clearly what discipleship is not. The enculturated, attractional, and seeker-sensitive church attempts its hand at discipleship and, according to the Hirsches, “On the odd occasions we have actually managed to engage in some form of discipleship, we have tended to limit it to issues of personal spirituality (prayer times, Bible study, God’s leading, tithing, etc. ) and not conceive of it as something that has direct ramifications beyond the individual’s privatized sensibilities. But discipleship in the way of Jesus is surely much more comprehensive than that.”<sup>51</sup> In light of current descriptions of a me-centered Christianity, their statement illuminates both cultural and modern church tendencies, one of which is to foster and support privatized notions of me Christianity.

The Hirsch’s make their point even more clearly when they say, “That we have cultivated an attenuated form of ‘designer’ discipleship, a do-it-yourself spirituality that

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<sup>50</sup> Alan Hirsch and Debra Hirsch, *Untamed: Reactivating a Missional Form of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010), Kindle location 68.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, Kindle location 69.



has little to say beyond the confines of the Christian community itself, only highlights the need to recover something a whole lot more vigorous than what we currently have.”<sup>52</sup> These authors reveal the tamed nature of the current church and call for a return to the untamed Jesus and gospel. Paul Santmire offers insight into the culture of consumerism. He writes, “Arguably, consumerism is driving us to destruction. The BP drilling disaster in the Gulf of Mexico appears to be a dramatic case in point. This is the logic behind it: We must find the energy resources we think we need in order to sustain our consumer economy, and if that means undertaking increasingly dangerous interventions into the earth’s ecosystems, so be it.”<sup>53</sup>

When considering the influences that have contributed to nontransmission of Christianity we must also examine some deep internal theological shortcuts. In his short essay entitled, “On the Transmission of Christianity,” C. S. Lewis recognized the core issue before the church. He writes, “If the younger generation have never been told what the Christians say and never heard any arguments in defense of it, then their agnosticism is fully explained.”<sup>54</sup> Lewis asserted that the church’s non-engagement with the next generation will ultimately create indifference to the Christian faith. An analysis by Whitney Bauman affirms what others have suggested. She writes, “We simply buy and

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<sup>52</sup> Hirsch and Hirsch, *Untamed*.

<sup>53</sup> H. Paul Santmire, “From Consumerism to Stewardship: The Troublesome Ambiguities of an Attractive Option.” *Dialog* 49, no. 4 (2010): 332-339. ATLA Religion Database with ATLA Serials, EBSCOhost (accessed May 29, 2014), 332.

<sup>54</sup> C.S. Lewis, “On the Transmission of Christianity,” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1970), Kindle location 1318.

consume our latest identity because the “no-self” of postmodernity lacks integrity, essence, substance.”<sup>55</sup>

### **Moralistic Therapeutic Deism**

Author and theologian Kenda Creasy Dean used her book, *Almost Christian*, to introduce an excellent synopsis of the current ecclesiological landscape. Her analysis reinforces what others have observed. She writes, “After two and half centuries of shacking up with the American dream, churches have perfected a dicey codependence between consumer-driven therapeutic individualism and religious pragmatism. These theological proxies gnaw, termite-like, at our identity as the Body of Christ, eroding our ability to recognize that Scripture life of self-giving love directly challenges the American gospel of self-fulfillment and self-actualization.”<sup>56</sup> The influence of the American culture on the church, in Dean’s perspective, has produced a watered-down church and diluted its identity. Dean challenges the gospel that emerges from this erosion. Dean suggests this emerging new Christian understanding finds expression through American teenagers in what she calls “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.” This new religion masquerading as the faith of the church is “supplanting Christianity as the dominant religion in American churches.”<sup>57</sup> *Deism* is defined as “a view contrasting to atheism and polytheism. It emerged in 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century England. It holds that knowledge of God comes through reason rather than revelation, and that after God

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<sup>55</sup> Whitney Bauman, “Consumerism and Capitalism: The True Costs of Integrity.” *Dialog* 49, no. 4 (2010): 263-264, accessed May 29, 2014, doi.10.1111/j.1540-6385.2010.00546.x.

<sup>56</sup> Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), Kindle location 128.

<sup>57</sup> Christian Smith and Melissa Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 171.

created the world, God had no further involvement in it.”<sup>58</sup> There are five basic tenants to

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism:

1. “A god exists who created and orders the world and watches over life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God is not involved in my life except when I need God to resolve a problem
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.”<sup>59</sup>

If Dean is correct, Christianity is losing its identity and has been preaching something other than a biblically- and theologically-sound faith. And if Sweet, Lewis, Dean, and Abraham are correct, the church has not transmitted the great tenants of Christianity. Instead, the church has transmitted an alternative and diluted faith. As it turns out, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, or some variation of it is being transmitted to the next generation. Sarah Caffrey Bachand offers her insight on Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. She writes, “First, mindful of the elevated need for security during this era of life, it's clear that we must respect teen faith in a God of *consolation*. The second implication flows from the first: we must expand the religious imagination of teenagers to include not only images of a God who consoles but also images of a *relationship* with God that promotes responsibility.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 73.

<sup>59</sup> Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian*, 280.

<sup>60</sup> Sarah Caffrey Bachand, “Living God or Cosmic Therapist? Implications of the National Survey of Youth and Religion for Christian Religious Education,” *Religious Education* 105, no. 2 (2010): 140-156, accessed May 29, 2014, DOI:10.1080/00344081003645137.

## Conclusion

Gnosticism, the Enlightenment, Consumerism, and Moralistic Therapeutic Deism have all crippled the church in transmitting its core beliefs to the next generation. There are no doubt other influences, but these are viewed as most substantial in their direct undermining of Christian discipleship and transmission of Christianity. Their combined influence has eroded the church's witness. According to the authors cited here, we are left with a deistic, highly individualized, consumeristic, gimmick-obsessed, relationally-deficient church in North America.

Is it possible the North American Protestant church has turned several generations away due to hermeneutical deficiencies? Is it possible the church lost its missional and incarnational presence in the world, and, as a result, began to lose ground? What is evident is the church is collapsing on itself. What is evident is the Christian faith has not been transmitted by the North American church to several generations. The result has been a declining church that is becoming even more irrelevant to upcoming generations. A new theology and delivery system is needed which will help Christianity flourish in the future.

Let me conclude with a hopeful comment from Dietrich Bonhoeffer and a map of what is to come in section 2. Bonhoeffer writes, "when the Bible speaks of following Jesus, it is proclaiming a discipleship which will liberate mankind from all man-made dogmas, from every burden and oppression, from every anxiety and torture which afflicts the conscience. If they follow Jesus, men escape from the hard yoke of their own laws, and submit to the kindly yoke of Jesus Christ."<sup>61</sup> A return to an authentic Christianity is a

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<sup>61</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), Kindle location 500.

return to genuine delivery method (discipleship) where the great tenants and story of our faith are transmitted from one generation to the next. The brand of discipleship Dietrich promoted liberates the next generation and reverses the Church Collapse Disorder (CCD).

While beekeepers continue to struggle with losses from Colony Collapse Disorder, honeybees may be making a comeback. Apiarists have cracked their hive lids with a renewed interest in helping colonies back to health. The same can be said for the church. Many are offering sound analysis and credible solutions to what plagues the hives of the church. There is a “buzz about the church.” The following section will magnify the buzz and address what others are doing in response to the condition of the modern church.

## SECTION 2: PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

### INTRODUCTION

Responses to the North American church’s inability to transmit the Christian faith tradition are varied. Many Christian theologians and writers—from the academy to the local church—are deeply troubled by the church’s decline and ineffectiveness. Several noted authors and movement leaders have taken the pulse of both the church and culture and made significant contributions to the conversation. They respond to the concerns, offer clear diagnoses and viable solutions in hopes of recovering a vital ministry. Leonard Sweet once said that “language makes culture. Change the language and you will change the culture.”<sup>62</sup> Others have made similar remarks, suggesting an alternative narrative.

Alan Hirsch recalls the wisdom of educator and philosopher Ivan Illich:

Ivan Illich was once asked what he thought was the most radical way to change society; was it through violent revolution or gradual reform? He gave a careful answer. Neither. Rather, he suggested that if one wanted to change society, then one must tell an alternative story. Illich is right; we need to reframe our understandings through a different lens, an alternative story, if we wish to move beyond the captivity of the predominantly institutional paradigm that clearly dominates our current approach to leadership and church.<sup>63</sup>

A growing number of theologians share Illich’s sentiment—the need to change the cultural language by telling an alternative story and in turn, change the culture of the church. Leaders like Mike Breen, Alan Hirsch, and Leonard Sweet agree that we must recover the language of mission and discipleship from the archives of the historical church. William Abraham, Kenda Creasy Dean, and others rightly point out that we have

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<sup>62</sup> Leonard Sweet, “America’s Civil Religion,” (lecture, Semiotics & Future Studies Cohort, George Fox Evangelical Seminary, Portland OR, August 2010).

<sup>63</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, Kindle location 610.

not delivered Christianity to the next generation. Nontransmission is both a symptom of a toxic church and the root problem. Dean writes, “For centuries, these two strategies—telling God’s story and enacting it—comprised the heart of Christian formation, or catechesis, the ‘handing on’ of a faith tradition from one generation to the next.”<sup>64</sup> Dean, aware of the centrality of story in the transmission of Christianity, claims that we have been handing over to the next generation a “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.” Equally disconcerting is the foreign gospel segments of the mainline church are proclaiming. The next generation is not hearing the rich and redemptive story contained within the Bible but, rather, some variation. Ultimately, the next generation will not have the sustainable resources of the gospel of Christ if the church’s deep-seated cultural narrative is not changed. In part, Dean highlights the current trends not only in the culture but in the church. Her book, *Almost Christian* is a valued perspective for any person in the church wanting to understand what the church is transmitting.

### **The Emergent Church Movement**

Several movements within modern Christianity have developed as new expressions of church. The first is the Emergent Church Movement. Marcus Borg says “The emerging paradigm has been visible for well over a hundred years. In the last twenty to thirty years, it has become a major grassroots movement among both laity and clergy in “mainline” or “old mainline” Protestant denominations.”<sup>65</sup> The emergent movement is a reaction to the decline of what Borg defines as the mainline church. It was an effort to reach people the mainline church couldn’t or wouldn’t. Phyllis Tickle

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<sup>64</sup> Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian*, Kindle location 62.

<sup>65</sup> Marcus J. Borg, *The Heart of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper, 2003), 6.

observes, "As the larger church became increasingly concerned about the drain of young adults away from institutional Christianity, Leadership (Leadership Network) sought to exercise its mission by helping to address the problem."<sup>66</sup>

The seminal figure in the emergent movement was Brian McLaren. In his book, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, McLaren defines himself with a broad brush, committed to diverse religious traditions and faith expressions. Dr. D. A. Carson, not a fan of McLaren, expresses his perspective on the emergent reality in his book, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*. He protests the emergent movement and stresses "that not only is the movement amorphous, but its boundaries are ill-defined."<sup>67</sup>

The emergent movement is one recent historical response to the declining and ineffective church. It found expression in numerous traditions and operated akin to house churches. It borrowed disciplines, practices, theology, and traditions from many of the mainline churches, as well as from cultural ideology and practices. Like many other movements, the emerging movement attempted to make Christianity available, relevant, and intelligent but ultimately failed because it only offered a deconstructive response and never solidified with a viable approach for a new church.

The emergent movement highlighted the deficiency of the church in its mission to hand over the faith. Its failure also serves as an example of the need to have strong theological roots, vision, and boundaries. The positive contributions the movement made identified the disparity between the culture and the church and offered a powerful example of what happens when theological grounding is absent.

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<sup>66</sup> Phyllis Tickle, *Emergence Christianity: What It Is, Where It Is Going, and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), Kindle location 1016.

<sup>67</sup> D.A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding A Movement and its Implications* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), Kindle location 98.



The next and more recent movement is the missional church movement. Where the emergent church movement failed theologically and organizationally, the missional movement is succeeding.

### **The Missional Church Movement**

Missional pioneer Mike Breen and 3DM have been on the front line of retelling the narrative of mission for the modern church. In addition to a missional resurgence, Breen and others have rechartered discipleship as well. Others like Hugh Halter, Jo Saxton, George Patterson, Neil Cole, Mike Frost, and Alan Hirsch have become leading figureheads and given the movement theological and structural foundations.

In recent history, missional conferences and networks have emerged as leading vehicles for recovering a missional culture. One such conference is Verge, the creation of Michael Stewart. Stewart determined that recovering a missional identity wasn't enough to sustain a movement. In 2012, the Verge Missional Conference focused its attention again on a missional impulse with emphasis on discipleship. A missional impulse is faithful to the gospel but has to be undergirded by a serious form of catechesis to maintain its vitality and growth. Movements like this one often have strong beginnings but taper off after some time because they don't have the biblical and theological maturity to continue. The earliest Methodists at Aldersgate Street exemplify a group of people with deep theological roots and discipleship at their core. This movement had the benefit of organizational pioneers with an unwavering commitment to discipleship. Stewart and others have done a good job of following this example, underpinning the network with deep biblical and theological reservoirs.

## Beyond the Mechanical—Imagining Disciple Making Differently

Whether it's tagged as discipleship, spiritual formation, or catechesis, the renewed narrative is prevalent in books, pulpits, conferences and the like. In *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time*, Greg Ogden highlights the need to return to disciple making and change the church culture. He writes, "If the long-term desire is to have a culture-shaping effect on the life of a church or ministry, the leaders must share the philosophy and lifestyle approach to discipling."<sup>68</sup> Others like Alan Hirsch, George Barna, Bill Hull, Michael Wilkins, Joel Comiskey, Alexander Bruce and Stephen Pickard share Ogden's outlook and have made their own contributions to changing the story of the modern church. I believe that the resurgence of disciple making language has only aided in resurrecting a practice long misplaced in Christianity. The sheer volume of material written about spiritual formation indicates many believe the church will recover or be renewed by both retelling the discipleship narrative and putting it into practice in the local church. These authors and practitioners have rightly returned to Jesus's template of calling and disciple making, recognizing Jesus cornered the theological and methodological market and is the most authoritative voice on the topic.

In response, Leonard Sweet has strategically reinstated a new narrative. He offers several approaches to evangelizing and discipling the culture in two books: *Nudge* and *So Beautiful*. He maintains that reintroducing story as a hermeneutical alternative to understanding biblical theology is one step on the journey to reach persons with the gospel and refocus the church from hermeneutical solitude to discipling abundance. In *So Beautiful* the missional, relational, and incarnational nature of the church is reawakened.

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<sup>68</sup> Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), Kindle location 2101.

Likewise, *Nudge* calls the church to its evangelical and incarnational roots by inviting Christians to go and semiotically find what God is up to in others and nudge them to relationship with the living God.

Part of the discipleship problem rests in the church's inadequacies, failures, theologies, and methodologies. The church's focus has been more about sustaining its status and defending its orthodox positions than equipping the saints for ministry.

Leonard Sweet once noted:

Western Christianity is largely belief based and church focused. It is concerned with landing on the right theology and doctrine and everyone else toes the line. The Jesus trimtab, in contrast, is relationship based and world focused. It is concerned with not so much what you believe as with whom you are following. It is less invested in maintaining and growing an institution and more invested in Jesus's passion for saving the world.<sup>69</sup>

What keeps most of us engaged is the belief that we can be instrumental in turning the church around and returning it to its God-given mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:16-20 NRSV).

Despite the flood of resources on missional communities and spiritual formation or discipleship, and the church's apparent desire to recapture Jesus's discipleship practices, one significant problem emerges. Most of the materials are mechanical in their approach to discipleship or spiritual formation. Most reinforce the concept of small groups, mentorship, accountable community, triads, biblical study, missional focus, worship, and life-on-life themes to help persons mature spiritually. All of these components together mirror the methodology of Jesus. However, something is missing. After reading through the conceptual and theological underpinnings, methodologies, and applications one omission became clear—story. Writing a book that mirrors Jesus's

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<sup>69</sup> Leonard Sweet, *What Matters Most: How We Got the Point but Missed the Person* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2004), Kindle location 276.

teaching and methods is valuable when it is imbedded in the narrative of life. Capturing the themes of the biblical stories, which constantly resurface, is important, primarily because the themes in the Bible inform a hermeneutic approach. This is what Mary Douglas calls ring composition.<sup>70</sup> The deep theological and hermeneutical issues at play within Christianity have to be acknowledged and worked while the church returns to a discipleship methodology.

Returning to Jesus's model of making followers is one countermeasure. While recovering Jesus's method for discipleship is to be applauded, most modern approaches have neglected imagination as an addendum to Jesus's template. The goal of many discipleship programs is to simply replicate an ancient approach through the modern day lens of leadership culture. George Barna's book, *Growing True Disciples*, is a good example of this. The title of the book alone indicates leadership dogma. While Barna offers tremendous insight, he is no doubt influenced by the leadership culture. He writes, "... discipleship, in other words, is about being and reproducing spiritually mature zealots for Christ."<sup>71</sup>

Eric Liu and Scott Noppe-Brandon offer insight in to what we are missing. They write, "If there is greatness to America—and we insist there is—it has always derived from the unseen seed of imagination, not from the conspicuous fruits of that seed (wealth, power, beauty, bling). We are transfixed with the fruit. We need more seed."<sup>72</sup> These authors write at length about the lack of imagination within the culture, especially in

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<sup>70</sup> Mary Douglas, *Thinking in Circles: An Essay on Ring Composition*, (London: Yale University Press, 2007), Kindle location 252.

<sup>71</sup> George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2001), Kindle location 16.

<sup>72</sup> Eric Liu and Scott Noppe-Brandon, *Imagination First: Unlocking the Power of Possibility*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009), Kindle location 26.

primary education. In response to a declining church and our inability to transmit the faith, some are refocusing on discipleship and mission as Jesus modeled them. While many writers are transfixed on the mechanical and sterile, wanting to simply replicate the model of Jesus, full-bodied discipleship demands more than a return to the template. It requires more imagination and a return to the source. More seed needs to be planted within the modern Christian church. Section three provides the seed of imagination needed to help the church recover a robust discipleship practice.

**SECTION 3: THE BUZZ ABOUT THE CHURCH:  
REIMAGINING DISCIPLESHIP THROUGH A THEOLOGY OF BEEKEEPING**

The church of North America is struggling to redefine itself in the postmodern world. It lacks theological clarity, is strained by hermeneutical approaches, and has lost the art of making followers. As a result, the sacred faith has not been transmitted and the church is steadily shrinking and becoming irrelevant to the culture. Section one identified some reasons why this is the case and indicated there is renewed “buzz” about the future of the church. This thesis is not particularly concerned with whether or not the institutional church in North America could/should be saved. I am concerned, however, about the continuation of Christianity and making sure the stories of God and his ways and processes are perpetuated.

The problem of nontransmission is concerning. Equally concerning is what has been historically excluded from theological discourse, namely creation. Most theological inquiry has focused on fall and redemption and left the revelatory doctrine of creation in the dust, metaphorically speaking. This thesis recovers creation and develops a theology of beekeeping. The claim is humanity can study and learn how to follow God through beekeeping.

The pages that follow will construct a methodology and reawaken divine revelation and creation. What will emerge is a theology of beekeeping which reimagines and informs the practice of discipleship. Fortunately, we don’t have to reinvent the theological or methodological wheel. History has provided us with ample theological

reservoirs. A theology of beekeeping will serve as a divine revelation into the character and purposes of God.

A theology of beekeeping suggests that God can be understood and experienced by studying and engaging a colony of honeybees. What follows is a systematic theology that addresses a methodology and divine revelation, explores a doctrine of creation, examines Jesus's approach, discovers the sacredness of honeybees in history and offers a new theology resulting in a fresh approach to maturing followers of Jesus.

## SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

### **Method**

“There are moments in the history of humankind that seem to be pregnant with future possibilities—although not so much by virtue of the clear promise that they offer, as because the old ways have run their course and it is necessary to venture in new directions.”<sup>73</sup> These opening remarks in Justo Gonzales's book ring loudly and characterize the modern mainline church in its struggle to survive. While Gonzales was referencing the end of the fifteenth century and beginning of the sixteenth, his remarks call our attention to the future of the contemporary church. They also invite us to see “pregnant” possibilities. One such possibility is the idea spiritual formation<sup>74</sup> can be informed by studying creation. In an essay entitled “Christian Spirituality and Creation: Ecospirituality,” Mary Gray resurrects the idea of a spirituality informed by creation. She

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<sup>73</sup> Justo L. Gonzales, *A History of Christian Thought: From the Protestant Reformation to the Twentieth Century, Volume III* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1975), 13.

<sup>74</sup> Spiritual formation, discipleship, disciple making, catechesis are viewed as the same process of maturing followers of Jesus. They will be used interchangeably throughout the document and signify the same idea.

writes, “Ecological Spirituality (or Ecospirituality) includes relating to the earth itself as a chosen focus. For Christianity this means placing Ecospirituality within faith in a God who created and sustained the entirety of creation or cosmos and destines all created organisms for a redeemed and transformed future.”<sup>75</sup>

The possibility of reimagining spirituality informed by a doctrine of creation calls for re-examining Christian sources and establishing a methodology. For that, we turn to Albert Outler’s Wesleyan Quadrilateral of scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral is used as a collective and collaborative tool to discover the nature and work of God. “Wesley believed that the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason.”<sup>76</sup> As a method, the quadrilateral has been used to conjoin Jesus’s approach to discipleship with creation’s approach to discipleship found in honeybees. The answers to epistemological questions and divine revelation are discovered in the execution of using this tool. The quadrilateral is a methodology which aids us in assessing and unraveling the divine disclosure. “For John Wesley the central purpose of Scripture was soteriological, and every doctrinal affirmation that is related to this saving truth is rooted in Scripture, even if it is not specifically formulated in Scripture.”<sup>77</sup> Wesley did operationalize the quadrilateral, strictly speaking, in his ministry and understood Scripture as primary for all things salvific. It is noteworthy, however, that

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<sup>75</sup> Mary Grey, “Christian Spirituality and Creation: Ecospirituality,” in *The Bloomsbury Guide to Christian Spirituality*, eds. Richard Woods and Peter Tyler (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012) 360.

<sup>76</sup> *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 1996), 74.

<sup>77</sup> Stephen W. Gunter, et al., *Wesley and the Quadrilateral: Renewing the Conversation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 132.



“there are occasions when Wesley seemed to make more grand claims for reason.”<sup>78</sup>

Metaphorically, the quadrilateral can be viewed as a four-legged stool. Each leg, being the same length, represents a member of the quadrilateral. As a method of theological inquiry, it takes all of them working together equally to understand and carry the weight of God’s disclosures in creation and Christ.

### DIVINE REVELATION

The history of Christian theology is as vast and complex as the human beings that undertake it. The sources for divine revelation become paramount as does a methodology to unravel theological underpinnings. The underpinnings for a theology of beekeeping find first expression in what has been revealed. In this section we address the epistemological question: how do we know what we know about God? The answer begins with the truth that God has revealed his nature through creation and Christ. “By *revelation* is generally meant the disclosure of what was previously unknown or uncertainly apprehended. In theology such disclosure is normally regarded as caused by the agency of God.”<sup>79</sup> While we mine the depths of earth in search of natural resources we have only scratched the surface in our understanding of God. Much time has been spent wrestling theologically with positions and responses to positions. The Enlightenment and its emphasis on reason and individualism is one significant contributor of this. “Only in the seventeenth century, when rationalists began to deny or

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>79</sup> David A. Pailin, *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology: Revelation*, eds. Alan Richardson and John Bowden, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), 503.

minimize revelation, did Christian theologians attempt to define and defend the concept in a systematic way.”<sup>80</sup>

Revelation is “making known hidden aspects of the character and purposes of God, of humanity in its relationship with God and of what is to occur in the future through the providence of God.”<sup>81</sup> Said another way, revelation is God’s self-disclosure of his nature, purposes, systems, and plans. Revelation scholarship often focuses on the substance or what is disclosed. Asking why God revealed himself leads to other important questions and answers. Why God would reveal his nature, purposes, plans and systems is the paramount question. Assumed intentionality is the reason revelations were given in the first place. We discover that God intentionally disclosed his nature and purposes as an invitation to enter into relationship. God is purposeful and provides access to his life. The first and most important consideration in understanding God’s revelations is seeing him as the source of knowledge and acknowledging his desire and intention to be in relationship with his creation. God’s intent in revealing himself is to invite humanity on a journey to discover the fullness of God. Beekeeping provides the revelation and nature of God in the connectivity and reliance of every living thing on God and each other for life.

The theme of Revelation as found in chapter 21 of the Bible is re-creation. Stratford Caldecott once observed, “For more important than the making of the world is its remaking. He didn’t just interpret the Scriptures; he fulfilled them. God became Man

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<sup>80</sup> Avery Dulles, *Systematic Theology, Volume I.: Faith and Revelations*, eds. Francis Schuller Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 92.

<sup>81</sup> Richardson and Bowden, eds., *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*, 503.

in order to give the world a new center, and by doing so save it.”<sup>82</sup> I argue remaking is important for the human condition but doesn’t supersede God’s story of creation in all its splendor and glory. God’s sacredness, goodness, connections, attributes, and systems are revealed in Scripture and in beekeeping. Between creation and re-creation, theology and relationship, stands Jesus Christ who reveals God’s desire to walk again with his creation, in his creation.

The foremost purpose in divine revelation is to reveal God’s intentions toward humanity and to incite a faith response or call us to relationship. The entomological study of honeybee society reveals God’s purposefulness in creation, systems which govern human life, and that we are intimately cared for. The purpose of honeybees is to provide needed nutrition for the human diet through honey production and pollination. Pollination is the needed service rendered by bees to mature crops for production. An entomological study of honeybees reveals a highly advanced social system which matures their young. The system found in a colony pushes and pulls the baby bees to maturity. Without this system of push and pull the baby bees will never emerge from the hive to pollinate needed crops.<sup>83</sup> In essence, maturing young, underdeveloped bees are pushed and pulled to adult foragers through a system. Without this system a colony will not only collapse, but subsequently will not fulfill its pollinating purpose. A chain reaction will occur and the human diet will suffer. The system of push and pull and pollinating nature of

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<sup>82</sup> Stratford Caldecott, *All Things Made New: The Mysteries of the World in Christ* (USA: Angelico Press/Sophia Perennis, 2011), 28.

<sup>83</sup> Brian Johnson, “Division of Labor in honeybees: Form, Function and Proximate Mechanism,” *Behav Ecol Sociobiol* 64 issue 3 (Jan 2010) 305-316, November 3, 2014, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2810364/>. The idea of push and pull and the differing castes comes from this source.

honeybees reveal God's loving and systematic care of His creation. It reveals God's purposefulness.

When noticed, revelation incites us to awe and faith in the one who made and sustains life. "Faith is seen as an affirmative intellectual response to revelation. Without a prior revelation on God's part faith would be impossible, for it would have no basis and no object."<sup>84</sup> Revelation summons a faith response. Revelation, then, is an invitation to a relationship by faith with the Holy God.

Divine revelation and narrative are the necessary content and mode of faith transmission in disciple making. Speaking to the importance of divine revelation, scholar Robert Chiles states, "God's revelation is required to clarify the inner meanings of events which otherwise appear mundane and insignificant."<sup>85</sup>

The establishment of creation as a divine revelation equal and connected to every other revelation has been important. While honeybees specifically appear to be mundane and insignificant, they reveal what Christ reveals. Namely, they disclose the system of discipleship Jesus used.

## RESURRECTING CREATION

Before unpacking a theology of beekeeping, the doctrine of creation must be released from its hermeneutical chains. A simple acknowledgement that creation is

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<sup>84</sup> Francis Schussler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, eds., *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives, Volume 1* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 92.

<sup>85</sup> Robert E. Chiles, *Theological Transition in American Methodism: 1790-1935* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America Inc., 1983) 401.

revelation isn't adequate. The doctrine of creation "is deserving of a careful treatment."<sup>86</sup> Reintroducing the doctrine of creation and reworking a hermeneutic that deploys the Wesleyan Quadrilateral to engage both creation and the biblical witness is a step in the right direction. In our North American culture we seem to have lost sight of what God has made, though his signature can't be authoritatively or rationally denied. "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so men are without excuse" (Romans 1:20). According to the apostle Paul, God has been revealing his nature and power from the beginning through his creation. The Creator teaches us much about his divine nature, systems, and purposes by way of creation. Creation is an affirming witness and calls for engagement to unravel the mysteries of God. A renewed model of discipleship suggests that the God who created the world and set in place systems to forge life executed the same systems when he made disciples. Jesus used the same model of discipleship used in creation to mature his chosen followers.

A doctrine of creation has untapped potential to disclose the purposes and nature of God. However, the doctrine of creation has often been overshadowed by hermeneutical responses to liberal theology. Gordon Spykman recognized fundamentalism's effect in displacing creation doctrine and offering a faulty hermeneutic. Let me offer one of his five major points on this influence. He writes:

First, it has contributed to the eclipse of the Biblical doctrine of creation as an ongoing and normative reality in Christian confession and life experience. Fundamentalists are, of course, militant in their defense of the creation account in Genesis over against the prevailing theories of evolution. Yet, the reality and meaningfulness of the world's createdness is largely suppressed. It attaches very

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<sup>86</sup> Anne M. Clifford, *Systematic Theology Volume I: Creation*, eds Francis Schussler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 197.

little significance to the creation order, with its divine ordinances, which still hold normatively for our life together in God's world.<sup>87</sup>

Fundamentalism's doctrinal position actually has "eclipsed" or suppressed the biblical doctrine of creation and subsequently given the biblical witness an unhealthy status. Liberal theology and the rise of fundamentalism are both reactionary and offer little to the conversation on God's nature and purposes. As Spykman observed, the Bible is used as a defensive tool rather than a redemptive narrative. The doctrine born of a fundamentalist movement is difficult to biblically support or defend. Fundamentalism's influence on biblical hermeneutics demands a renewed approach that neither holds higher criticism hostage nor disavows key biblical doctrines, events and stories. Examining creation highlights not only the numerous revelations of God's created order but also reinforces the concept of the connectivity of all living things and their symbiotic relationships. In his book, *In Plain Sight: Seeing God's Signature Throughout Creation*, Dr. Charles R. Gordon magnifies this connectivity and reveals the Creator's divine design in what he calls "The Lattice of Life." He writes:

My parents built a chicken coop out of traditional chicken wire lattice, which has a distinctive pattern of interconnected hexagons. I did not realize it then, but this pattern is the most fundamental building block of life. Carbon Molecules naturally form the same hexagonal shapes that can connect like that chicken wire lattice. Carbon, the same substance in humble pencil lead and the most beautiful diamond, is crucial to life. The reason why is because the bonds carbon molecules form are uniquely suited to form the basis of organic chemistry, and even DNA itself. And this pattern doesn't stop there. We see it repeated in honeycombs (how do bees know how to make those?) and in the covering of the eye in the cornea.<sup>88</sup>

Dr. Gordon creates awareness of the divine designer and the interconnectedness of all of life when he makes this observation about the creation story. The second chapter

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<sup>87</sup> Spykman, lecture.

<sup>88</sup> Charles R. Gordon, *In Plain Sight: Seeing God's Signature throughout Creation* (Tyler, TX: Copyright by Charles Jordan, 2009), 159.

of Genesis tells us God created man from the dust of the earth “and that’s what carbon powder is—dust!”<sup>89</sup> Catholic theologian Anne Clifford affirms those sentiments in her essay, “Creation.” She writes, “the doctrine of creation expresses the belief that God is the origin, ground, and goal of the world and of everything in it. Creation is the fundamental belief from which flows much of what Christians profess about God, about the cosmos we inhabit, and about our destiny and hope.”<sup>90</sup> Perry LeFevre observes both the theological deficiencies in modern scholarship and benefits of creation focused spirituality. He writes, “creation-centered spirituality is the most Jewish, the most biblical, the most prophetic, the most like the kind Jesus of Nazareth preached and lived. Such spirituality has been almost displaced by an in-troverted, anti-artistic, anti-intellectual, apolitical, sentimental, dualistic, ascetic, and in many ways masochistic spirituality parading as a Christian spirituality.”<sup>91</sup>

John Wesley recognized the need for our Christian faith to be more comprehensive when he wrote, “I believe in my heart that faith in Jesus Christ can and will lead us beyond an exclusive concern for the well-being of other human beings to the broader concern for the well-being of the birds in our backyard, the fish in our rivers, and every living creature on the face of the earth.”<sup>92</sup> In an article entitled, “Christian Spirituality and Creation: Ecospirituality,” author Mary Grey focuses on an emerging theology called Ecospirituality. She writes, “concern for the environment has emerged as

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 160.

<sup>90</sup> Clifford, *Systematic Theology Volume I: Creation*, 197.

<sup>91</sup> Perry D. LeFevre, *Chicago Theological Seminary Register* 72 no 2 Spr. 1982, p 40-48.

<sup>92</sup> RBC Ministries, “Wonder of Creation,” n.d., Accessed January 15, 2014, <http://wonderofcreation.org/creation-quotations/john-wesley-1701-1791/>.

a specific focus within the last 30 years: It has now become an explicit dimension of Christian Spirituality. Growing awareness of the ecological crisis has awakened Christians not only to a sense of responsibility but to the fact that the forgotten dimension—creation—should have been at the heart of their spirituality in the first place.”<sup>93</sup> Grey observed what many others have noted, that Christian spirituality is recovering a creation element long displaced. Her article is a sign the conversation is being renewed and the doctrine of creation is being resurrected. Robert Barron, in his summation of the theology of Thomas Aquinas, notes the influence of creation on Aquinas’s *De Potentia*. Barron writes, “in the end, creation is nothing other than a life in conformity with the icon of Christ, nothing other than the path of discipleship.”<sup>94</sup> Creation is discipleship.

Embedded deep within creation are gifts. One such gift are honeybees. In her book, *An Altar in the World*, Barbara Brown Taylor calls her audience to return to numerous practices she refers to as *altars*. Paying attention is one such practice. She writes, “The practice of paying attention is as simple as looking twice at people and things you might just as easily ignore.”<sup>95</sup> Creation contributes to the conversation about how to form people spiritually. This thesis is an invitation to pay attention to the often overlooked or ignored revelation of creation. The gift of honeybees, like so many other examples in creation, offers humanity an opportunity to see the connectivity of all things and view the masterful mind of God. Author Leah Kostamo magnifies this thesis in her

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<sup>93</sup> Grey, *The Bloomsbury Guide to Christian Spirituality*, 360.

<sup>94</sup> Robert Barron, *A Study of the De Potentia of Thomas Aquinas in Light of the Dogmatik of Paul Tillich: Creation as Discipleship* (Mellen Research University Press: San Francisco, 1993), 485.

<sup>95</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith*, (USA: HarperCollins e-books, 2009), Kindle location 564.



book, *Planted: A Story of Creation, Calling and Community*. In her care for God's creation and in story form, Kostamo writes, "It's obvious that in biological terms it is impossible to be truly independent, else, what would one eat, breathe, or drink? The stronger the biological interconnections, the stronger the creature. Likewise sociologically, we are interconnected through webs of relationships that, when strong, translate into emotional and spiritual health and well-being."<sup>96</sup> In light of Kostamo's observation, and taken one step further, theological health is dependent on the interconnection and collaboration of God's creation and the redemption story.

## REDISCOVERING THE PRACTICE OF DISCIPLE MAKING

### **Introduction**

William Abraham, Albert Cook Outler Professor of Wesley Studies at Perkins School of Theology, once noted that the postmodern church was "quite incapable of making disciples of Jesus Christ."<sup>97</sup> Abraham was noting an unhealthy church that had somehow lost its identity as a disciple making body. Hirsch, one of the leading spokespersons for the Missional Community Movement, notes that "foundational to any movement is discipleship."<sup>98</sup> The great movement of Methodism had its source in discipleship. In order to recover its roots the 1996 General Conference of the United Methodist Church (UMC) convened and adopted the mission to "Make Disciples of Jesus

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<sup>96</sup> Leah Kostamo, *Planted: A Story of Creation, Calling and Community*, (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), Kindle location 643.

<sup>97</sup> William Abraham, "Systematic Theology I," (lecture in Systematic Theology course, Perkins School of Theology, Dallas, 2001).

<sup>98</sup> Alan Hirsch, "Alan Hirsch: Disciple Making," (video, Verge Network, February 2010), February, 2012, <http://vimeo.com/15475814>.

Christ.” However, in spite of this strong move to recover the practice, the General Conference failed to “operationalize it.”<sup>99</sup>

United Methodist bishop Robert Schnase recently wrote a book called *Seven Levers: Missional Strategies for Conferences* in which he outlines the cumbersome institution we have inherited and suggests new strategies for health. Speaking to the issue of conferences he writes, “No one intended to create conferences so complex, diffuse, and difficult to lead. Nevertheless, we’ve inherited systems that are no longer conducive to our mission. They respond slowly, and the endless checks and balances foster an institutional conservatism that makes change nearly impossible. Rules meant to guarantee consistency and connection-wide compliance limit local creativity and the capacity to organize according to context.”<sup>100</sup>

The inherited system in the UMC is not conducive for operationalizing disciple making. Bishop Schnase also points out that “simply working harder isn’t helping because our way of doing things appears less relevant and more distant from real world needs than ever before. Approaching our complex and outdated systems is like stepping into a time machine that takes us back to another age of complex bureaucracies, convoluted systems, obscure rules, quaint traditions, endless reports, and infinitely slow processes.”<sup>101</sup> The UMC is one example of many mainline churches that struggle with institutional minutia.

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<sup>99</sup> Abraham, “Billy Abraham on Engaging the Culture,” John Meunier blog.

<sup>100</sup> Robert Schnase, *Seven Levers: Missional Strategies for Conferences*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), 10.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

In attempting to recover the theoretical components of disciple making it is important to note the pitfalls. Ron Bennett, in his book, *Intentional Disciplemaking*, once noted, “Unfortunately, what seems like common sense in the physical world too often becomes the exception in the spiritual world. Discipleship efforts often flounder not due to a lack of spiritual terms or religious ideas, but because leaders don’t create and communicate an easily understood blueprint.”<sup>102</sup> The blueprint proposed continues with the framework of Jesus’s model for discipleship. After defining what a disciple is we will consider accountable community, incarnational ministry and multiplication as key drivers of Jesus’s ministry.

Disciple can be defined in numerous ways.” Its basic meaning is “learner” or “pupil.”<sup>103</sup> “In the New Testament, the Greek word *mathētēs*, which means “disciple,” is found exclusively in the gospels and the book of Acts. George Peters, in an article entitled, *The Call of God*, defines his understanding of what a follower of Jesus is. He writes,

A Christian disciple is more than a believer. A disciple is more than a learner, at least, a learner in ordinary sense of the word. A disciple is more than a follower and imitator of Christ, more than a holy enthusiast for Christ, yea even more than living a life of full devotion to the Lord. A disciple is a believing person living a life of conscious and constant identification with the Lord in life, death, and resurrection through words, behavior, attitudes, motives, and purpose, fully realizing Christ’s absolute ownership of his life, joyfully embracing the Saviorhood of Christ, delighting in the Lordship of Christ and living by the abiding, indwelling resources of Christ according to the imprinted pattern and purpose of Christ for the chief end of glorifying his Lord and Savior.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Ron, Bennett, *Intentional Disciplemaking: Cultivating Spiritual Maturity in the Local Church*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2001), 26.

<sup>103</sup> *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “disciple,” (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003).

<sup>104</sup> George W. Peters, “The Call of God,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120 (October-December 1963): 327.

“Although Paul never uses the term, he often describes those who had the characteristics of being disciples.”<sup>105</sup> “Matthew uses the term “disciple” seventy-two times in sixty-nine verses. The word *disciple* begins to disappear from the Bible in the Book of Acts, and it never occurs in the Epistles. This reflects the transition to the “corporate discipling” of the church. This represents a clear contrast with the one-on-one, leader-to-follower approach of the Gospels.”<sup>106</sup>

Discipleship, then, is the process of apprenticing a student to follow the living Christ. “A disciple was someone who learned a skill or way of life from a teacher.”<sup>107</sup> Richard Calenberg notes, “The historical roots of discipleship are found in the terminology and practice of the Greek philosophical schools, after which the Hebrew rabbinical schools were patterned. Chief characteristics of discipleship included submission to the teaching of the master teacher, a close personal living relationship with him, and propagation of his teaching.”<sup>108</sup> Calenberg also adds, “All believers were challenged to meet the demands of discipleship (submission to His authority, denial of self, service, etc.) and only who did were “truly” disciples (John 8:31).”<sup>109</sup> Daniel Malone

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<sup>105</sup> *Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words: 200 Greek and 200 Hebrew Words Defined and Explained*, s.v. “word,” (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000).

<sup>106</sup> Stuart K. Weber and Max Anders, *Holman New Testament Commentary—Matthew*, Vol. 1, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000).

<sup>107</sup> Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola, *Jesus: A Theography* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2012), 130.

<sup>108</sup> Richard D. Calenberg, “The New Testament Doctrine of Discipleship,” (PhD diss., Grace Theological Seminary, 1981), 1.

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

affirms, “Under Hellenistic academic influence, the Rabbinate developed fellowships of disciples and traditions of interpretation.”<sup>110</sup>

In addition to Greek and Rabbinic schools being mentor/model based and deeply relational they also were noted for one more shared aspect. Calenberg observes,

By way of observation it is further apparent that the Jewish schools reflect the same basis characteristics as the Greek school:

- (I) Both were fellowships of disciples gathered around an authoritative master teacher.
- (II) Both were characterized by learning not only through the teaching of the master but also by observation and imitation of his life in living situations.
- (III) Both were committed to the important task of perpetuating the tradition associated with master and the school.”<sup>111</sup>

One of the most impactful books on disciple making is Bill Hull’s *Jesus Christ Disciplemaker*. Hull notes four distinct phases in Jesus’s process of recruiting and making disciples. “First, in the case of the early disciples, he provided a four month introductory course in the ministry—*come and see*—followed by a short but meaningful opportunity to think it over. Only then did he directly challenge them—*come and follow me*. The third phase of training was *come and be with me*. The last phase of this model is *remain in me*.”<sup>112</sup> Jesus began relationships with the disciples before actually calling them to follow. Within this process Jesus calls and trains his disciples. Jesus formed an accountable community while living an incarnational and missional posture. The result was a movement which transformed the world. It was sustained by the fact Jesus had trained and equipped his disciples in person. The last command Jesus gave his disciples in Matthew was to multiply, in essence, to do what he had done in them.

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<sup>110</sup> Daniel Malone, “Riches and Discipleship,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 9 (April 1979):81.

<sup>111</sup> Calenberg, *The New Testament Doctrine of Discipleship*, 30.

<sup>112</sup> Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciplemaker*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1984), 100.

We turn now to the central tenants of Jesus’s ministry: accountable community, incarnational ministry and multiplication.

### ACCOUNTABLE COMMUNITY

Stephen Pickard’s book, *In-Between God*, magnifies the need for good theological work, community orientation, and discipleship. He writes, “Theology begins in the middle of our lives, their complex and often painful circumstances and joyful celebrations. This gives theology an inescapable ecclesial flavor; it is a work undertaken in and by the human community. The most rigorous intellectual work of theology is always framed and informed by our life together in God’s world.”<sup>113</sup> According to Pickard, theological discovery is an important part of the solution for the modern church and it occurs in the context of community and rigorous discipleship. This theological enterprise, he maintains, happens within accountable faith-based relationships. God instituted community orientation not only among humans but among other creatures. Honeybees are a good example of community.<sup>114</sup>

Leonard Sweet once remarked:

Connection is one of the absolutes of life. We don’t choose it; it is hard-wired within us. Our well-being depends on our ability to connect with other humans. This drive pushes us with as much force as the longing for self-expression, our attraction to stories and storytelling, and the core human urge to know others and to be known. These are not all the things that make us human, but taken together they go a long way toward defining a human being as God created us.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Stephen Pickard, *In-Between God: Theology, Community and Discipleship*, (Australia: ATF Theology, 2011), Kindle location 122.

<sup>114</sup> Within this document the term “community” is interchangeable with the term “colony.” The idea of colonization is synonymous with community building.

<sup>115</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Viral: How Social Networking is Poised to Ignite Revival*, (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2012), Kindle location 143-144.

Sweet identifies what God has ordained as one of the absolutes of life—community. It is in community we are formed as disciples of Jesus.

When Jesus called his first disciples, he created and colonized a new community (Mt. 4, Jn. 1). Jesus spent the next several years getting to know, instructing and sending his apprentices out into the mission field. Creating accountable community was even a significant part of the early church's experience. "From the earliest days of the church, faith instruction involved guides (catechists) who were themselves participants in the church's behind-the-wall conversations. A catechist walked beside the novice Christian throughout the formation period."<sup>116</sup> The early church followed the pattern Jesus had given. Like Jesus, catechists disciplined their followers. It is hard to imagine forming disciples without guides to model what it means to follow Christ. The dual emphasis of catechesis is transmitting not only our great biblical and theological heritage, but also what it means to be in relationship with God in Christ. Covenant community, mentoring and modeling were all aspects of Jesus's ministry as well as that of the early church.

The current church focuses more on the individual's needs. Community has been sacrificed on the altar of individualism and self-expression. Such a posture is counter-intuitive and unproductive for the church. Missional church leader Norris says, "Under the weighty influence of modernism, combined with American sentiments of free enterprise and autonomy, we live in a time of extreme individualism ubiquitous in all areas of life, especially religion."<sup>117</sup> The modern church is seeker sensitive and a reflection of the individualistic culture that surrounds and infiltrates it. But discipleship,

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<sup>116</sup> Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian*, Kindle location 2059.

<sup>117</sup> Norris, *Pilgrim Practices*, Kindle location 167.

as modeled by Jesus, is community centered and acts as an incubator for making learners and followers. Norris concludes by saying that “in many ways, churches in North America have lost the original, radical sense of community; the original, radical sense of common mission; the original, radical sense of discipleship.”<sup>118</sup> The culture’s individualistic tendencies and our loss of the accountable community Jesus created leave us with a dilemma. As Sweet suggested, connection is intrinsic. People long for community.

What components do we need to extract from our history and replant in our current context that will help us disciple people into the kingdom of God? Pickard fleshes these out with a deeper look at theology, community, and discipleship. The disciples who talked with Jesus on the way to Emmaus illustrate one aspect of discipleship—it is a process—a journey “without shortcuts or dead ends.”<sup>119</sup> Jesus invited the disciples to abandon their careers and set out on a journey with him. They journeyed in the company of others with the Twelve forming a growth group. “Human community, like theology, does not come neat and finished but is complex, constantly changing, remarkably creative and often in need of repair and renewal. It is no surprise then that Christian discipleship exhibits similar characteristics.”<sup>120</sup> God created community and in Jesus’s first acts in ministry, he ordered community. It would be on journey, in this community that Jesus

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., Kindle location 170.

<sup>119</sup> Pickard, *In-Between God*, Kindle location 103.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., Kindle location 125.



would imprint his first followers. Richard Story notes that “living in community is hard work, as anyone who has tried it will know.”<sup>121</sup>

Genuine, accountable community is a key component in discipling people into a relationship with God. It is the catalyst for deepening relationships with God and one another. Without it the church defaults to its current mode of making members and servicing clients instead. Nevertheless, discipleship has been making a comeback, and as Hull once noted at the Ignite Discipleship Conference, “disciple making has now become popular again.”<sup>122</sup> Popular books like *Intentional Disciplemaking* by Ron Bennett, *The Lost Art of Disciple Making* by Leroy Eims, and *Organic Discipleship: Mentoring Others Into Spiritual Maturity* by Dennis McCallum and Jessica Lowery are needed resources to retell the narrative of discipleship.

One of the most scholarly and well written resources on discipleship is Greg Ogden’s, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time*. Ogden recovers the model and power of organizing disciple making around a triad. He observes that “disciple making is not a program but a relationship.”<sup>123</sup> Raising up followers is very intentional and centered around community life and, according to Ogden, is best accomplished in triad form. He writes, “the three elements of relational investment, multiplication and transformation come together powerfully in the model of reproducible

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<sup>121</sup> Richard Story. “We Love Because God First Loved Us: Experiences of Creation and Community in a Rocha Field Centres,” *Stimulus: The New Zealand Journal of Christian Thought & Practice* 15 Issue 4 (Nov 2007), p. 9-11.

<sup>122</sup> Bill Hull, “Life of Dallas Willard,” (presentation, Ignite Disciple Making Conference, Colleyville, TX, February 7, 2014).

<sup>123</sup> Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, Kindle location 144.

triads.<sup>124</sup> Ogden takes this idea from Jesus himself, using the transfiguration as one example. Matthew writes: “Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white” (Mt 17:1-2).

Stuart Weber notes, “Jesus took his inner group of three disciples—Peter, James, and John—up on a mountain”<sup>125</sup> Within this inner circle Jesus invested the most. Why? Ogden answers, “what we will discover in the ministries of Jesus and Paul is that they staked their fruitfulness on intentional, relational investment in a few. This is the way to ensure the linkage of discipleship from one generation to the next.”<sup>126</sup>

The method or discipleship template of Jesus included intentional, accountable and highly relational community. A template for the modern church, articulated by pastors and teachers like Ogden, suggests a return to an inner circle approach to making followers of Jesus. Within these highly relational communities deeply committed disciples of Jesus are born and matured.

## INCARNATIONAL LIFE

The second component for effective discipleship is an incarnational approach. One of the best descriptions of the incarnational life is from Leonard Sweet. He writes, “this is what *missional* means: to participate in the mission of Jesus in the world, to incarnate in the experiences of our lives and our communities the good news of God’s

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., Kindle location 151.

<sup>125</sup> Weber and Anders, *Holman New Testament Commentary—Matthew*, Logos Addition, n.p.

<sup>126</sup> Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, Kindle location 571.

love for the world.”<sup>127</sup> Sweet wasn’t defining the missional community in that statement. He was defining what it means to be missionally incarnated in the world for God’s kingdom. Vincent Beresford observes, “We must once again revisit the ecclesiology of the church and ask God to cure us from our missional amnesia.”<sup>128</sup> The church’s failure in this regard results in the current status—a declining church. At the same time, Christians don’t learn how to be in mission without taking to the mission field. A component of Jesus’s discipleship was actually sending his disciples out onto the mission field. Luke 10 records that the “Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go” (Lk 10:1 NIV). While a numerically small accountable discipleship group is personal, intimate, and committed to growth it will need to be on mission to be fruitful. Living out the faith we study and proclaim incarnationally is the hallmark of what it truly means to follow Jesus.

Another essential or component to making disciples is a renewed focus on being a missional community. “Christian mission—the goal and way of discipleship—is essentially about the formation and transformation of identity.”<sup>129</sup> The fruit of living life on life in accountable community is the shaping or reshaping of our identity. Much of Christian educational practices are undergirded with the belief that disciples are born and made by an ancient gnostic approach of pumping Scripture, doctrine, and tradition into students. In this belief knowledge is salvation. While the didactical component of faith can be found both in Jesus’s ministry and other popular movements like the one

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<sup>127</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Real Church in a Social-Network World: From Facebook to Face-to-Face Faith*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2011), 9.

<sup>128</sup> Vincent Beresford, “Becoming Fully Human: RE-Imagining Christian Discipleship for an Emerging Culture” (DMin diss., George Fox Evangelical Seminary, 2010), 92.

<sup>129</sup> Norris, *Pilgrim Practices*, Kindle location 525.

inaugurated by John and Charles Wesley, it is not the end all of forming followers of Jesus Christ. Jesus engaged and taught his followers while out on mission in the cultural context of his day. Those valuable experiences, both successes and failures, would serve to shape the disciples.

Raising disciples who are both present and active in the context God gave us is the model Jesus demonstrated in the gospels. In other words, identity formation and missional engagement are simultaneous events on the Christian pilgrimage. “The same pilgrim practices that form and develop disciples also witness to the world of God’s mission.”<sup>130</sup> It is in this mission that we are discipled and make disciples. It is in this mission that we forge community, learn the faith, and are sent. This is the method Jesus employed. He called twelve persons, did life with them, and raised them to be on mission. The central message of Jesus’s ministry— love— ultimately killed him. “Then he said to them all: Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it” (Lk. 9:23-24 NIV).

## MULTIPLICATION

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth (Genesis 1:28).

The first command in the Bible, repeated more than once, is to multiply. This verse illustrates the process the Creator put in place to ensure multiplication—a process that centers on seeds and dominion (stewarding). Consider for a moment the process that

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., Kindle location 182.

a seed-bearing tree must undertake in order for it to produce mature fruit. Once fruit is matured it has the potential to multiply because of the seeds it has produced.

Multiplication that leads to fruitfulness is only possible when the fruit matures. The process from seed to maturity to multiplication hinges in large part on the honeybee and its pollinating efforts. Our ecosystem is dependent on the fulfillment of Genesis 1:28 and must be stewarded. Everything, including the honeybee, has to multiply and be stewarded in order for life to be sustained.

The command in Genesis 1:28 is applicable to every living species and governs every process. This is evidenced in the ministry of Jesus, with the obvious examples of the multiplication of the fish and loaves, and his command in Matthew 28 to multiply disciples. Jesus brought the disciples to maturity and then commissioned them to multiply or make more disciples. They became the stewards of the process to mature the next generation of followers to multiply. The end result of discipleship is not only mature fruit, but reproducible fruit that continues making disciples.

In an interview with Verge Network, Hirsch once quipped that we should not start churches, but rather we should start movements. Hirsch advocates that discipleship movements have the potential for exponential growth. Hirsch once said, “Jesus took twelve guys and built a movement that changed the world.”<sup>131</sup> Jesus began this movement with multiplication in mind. Jesus entrusted the survival of the good news to a handful of men in whom he made a significant investment of time and teaching. Using the techniques of accountable community, incarnational life, and multiplication Jesus formed the Twelve into a movement that would transmit the faith.

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<sup>131</sup> Hirsch, “Disciple-Making.”

The disciples of Jesus were doing an apprenticeship with him. Hull once noted, “apprenticeship is very important, but there comes a time when the student graduates and goes out to confront the world alone, putting into practice all that he or she has learned.”<sup>132</sup> Hence, the fruit of Jesus and John Wesley’s ministries were disciples who produced more disciples. The church must attend to a process that produces multiplying disciples.

### OPERATIONALIZING DISCIPLE MAKING

How do we operationalize disciple making in the local church? As a strategy, the most effective way to begin and continue is to tell the story of disciple making in the local church or district. The culture of church will change when the congregation’s story changes. Those wanting to see disciple making return to the church must do the groundwork and begin holy conversations with the willing. Disciple making is intentional and will call for deep investment in a few. Disciple making, done correctly, involves a mentor with apprentices within the larger community of faith. Disciples are grown and matured in loving community and in life on life relationships. As Hull noted, Jesus spent time getting to know the disciples before actually calling them to deeper commitment.<sup>133</sup> The investment in relationship inside and outside the church is significant and takes considerable time. The fruit of this investment, however, pays large dividends.

The process of telling the narrative of disciple making and operationalizing it in the local church will take considerable time and investment. A part of the investment is sharing the narrative and beginning to disciple those around you who are willing to

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<sup>132</sup> Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciplemaker*, 168.

<sup>133</sup> Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciplemaker*, 100.

follow. The crucial components of maturing and multiplying followers is relational investment in community and context of the local ministry. Central to that process are the evangelists. Identifying and discipling them is paramount to the success of transitioning a church from its current health to a maturing and multiplying body of believers.

The process of maturing followers into multipliers, found in scripture and creation, hinges on creating accountable community and maintaining a missional/incarnational posture. To give focus and hold the church's attention on discipleship it will be important to operationalize these concepts within the local church.

The question of how to help the North American church reclaim transmission of the Christian faith through the vehicle of discipleship has been the driving question throughout. Telling the story and sharing the language of discipleship is the first step. Organizing willing congregational members into small cohort groups where they are disciplined into deeper faith and focused on a common mission will foster the type of community and relationships that will sustain the group. This would be step two in operationalizing the process of helping the church back to health and fruitfulness. Imbedded in the DNA of each group is a missional and incarnational tendency that carries over into new groups that are formed from parent groups. The DNA of discipleship groups are commitment, accountability, and community building through a common mission. They are invitational, relational and mentor-based. Such groups not only learn theoretically, but they also grow as they incarnate and follow the mission of Jesus.

This simple process is how the Methodist Movement started. John and Charles Wesley started meeting with a handful of others interested in seeing the Church of

England reformed. They began a ritual of prayer and a rigorous study of Scripture. From that nucleus, Methodism was born. However, Methodism was a movement that eventually settled into an institution. How we transition the church from an institution back to disciple making is by creating committed and accountable discipleship cohorts with an incarnational and missional approach. This approach is revealed in the life and ministry of Jesus and in the Creator’s honeybees. The following will familiarize the reader with the metaphor.

### HONEYBEES (*Apis Mellifera*) AN INTRODUCTION

Author Margaret Feinberg, in her book, *Scouting the Divine: my search for God in wine, wool, and wild honey*, interviewed a commercial beekeeper. She “realized that bees and followers of God have something in common—each has a specific role to play in order to effectively serve a greater purpose within the community (and it might change).”<sup>134</sup> In her pursuit of the divine, Margaret began to explore something she knew very little about—honeybees and their contribution to the human race. Using honeybees as the guiding metaphor, we will weave the metaphor with the practice of discipleship to give us an imaginative and authoritative approach to disciple making.

Honeybees (*Apis Mellifera*) “have existed for at least 30 million years.”<sup>135</sup> They live in a colonized order with thousands of bees. “For a honeybee colony is an immense family consisting of the mother queen and her thousands of progeny. It is also true that the many thousands of attentive daughters (the workers) of the mother queen are,

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<sup>134</sup> Margaret Feinberg, *Scouting the Divine: my search for God in wine, wool, and wild honey* (USA: Zondervan, 2009), Kindle location 1658.

<sup>135</sup> Thomas D. Seeley. *The Five Habits of Highly Effective Honeybees: And What We Can Learn From Them* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010), Kindle location 35.



ultimately, all striving to promote her survival and reproduction.”<sup>136</sup> The queen is the center of a colony’s life and “is longer than either the drones or workers, but her size, in other respects, is a medium between the two.”<sup>137</sup> The large social group is comprised of drones (male bees from unfertilized eggs), female workers (non-fertile egg layers) and a single queen. The worker bees comprise the vast majority of the colony and do all the work in and out of the hive, with the exception of breeding and egg laying. The drone bee’s sole purpose is to mate with queens. The hatching queen will leave the colony for her nuptial flight with eight to ten drones. The queen will store the sperm in her abdomen for her life and fertilize every worker egg she lays. Once fertilized, the queen will begin to lay her eggs ten days after her nuptial flight. “Each summer day, she monotonously lays 1,500 or so eggs needed to maintain her colony’s workforce.”<sup>138</sup> Twenty-one days later her first offspring begin to emerge from their cells. Every day after the twenty-first day, 1500 eggs hatch so the colony population proliferates in a short period of time. The new queen that hatches and mates is the daughter of the queen she replaced. Prior to her birth, the mother queen swarmed with the young bees. The young queen is now left with the remainder of the colony of older bees and hatching infants. The younger bees that swarmed with the already fertile queen will live longer and be able to build nest with the honey they took from the parent colony. Swarming is a natural process to perpetuate and multiply the specie. Honey is needed to produce the wax for the nest and storage.

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<sup>136</sup> Thomas D. Seeley. *Honeybee Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), Kindle location 87.

<sup>137</sup> Moses Quinby. *Mysteries of Bee-Keeping Explained* (New York: C.M. Saxton, Agriculture Book Publisher, 1853), Kindle location 543.

<sup>138</sup> Seeley, *Honeybee Democracy*, Kindle location 96.

One of the honeybee's roles in creation is to pollinate commercial crops and flowers. "Honey bees are the most economically valuable pollinators of agricultural crops worldwide."<sup>139</sup> Other researchers affirm the "insect pollination is an important ecosystem service to agriculture, improving production in, 75% of global crops [1], including many important sources of nutrients in the human diet[2], and contributing an estimated J153bn to global agricultural crop value."<sup>140</sup>

However, honeybees don't just serve humanity through pollination and honey production. They are also an illustration of divine purposes, plans, and systems. Honeybees speak to the interconnection of every living thing and to the praise of their Creator. Michael O'Malley writes, "the organizing theme of the hive is that everything is done for the good of the whole, and the community is central to the operation of the colony."<sup>141</sup> The honeybee exists for the betterment of the colony and gives its life for the community. As a "true social system, every bee works and sacrifices to produce an organization that is greater than the sum of the parts."<sup>142</sup> Teresa Morgan in *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* writes, "Bees were widely used as an image of a model society. They are described as perfectly social creatures who subordinate their individuality to the harmonious whole."<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Deborah A. Delaney, "Genetic Characterization of U.S Honey Bee Populations," (PhD diss., Washington State University, August 2008), 13.

<sup>140</sup> Tom D. Breeze, et al., "Agricultural Policies Exacerbate Honeybee Pollination Service Supply-Demand Mismatches Across Europe," *PLoS ONE*, 9 Issue 1 (Jan2014), 1-8, p. 1.

<sup>141</sup> Michael O'Malley, *The Wisdom of Bees: What The Hive Can Teach Business About Leadership, Efficiency, and Growth*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2010), Kindle location 30.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Teresa Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 263.

Honeybees are an integral part of the created order and as such offer an object lesson for the human race. Beekeeping speaks volumes about creation, God's purposes and nature. Studying the honeybee and its colony gives us insight into discipleship. In the same way Jesus used the metaphors of his day to articulate Kingdom truths, the metaphor of bees can help us develop a deeper understanding of discipleship through community, mission, and multiplication. However, beekeeping is more than a descriptive metaphor for the church and the process of discipleship. Beekeeping is a revelation of the nature and systems of God that informs our understanding of God and practice of discipleship. This thesis presents a discipleship story right out of God's creation. The aim of a theology of beekeeping is to help the church return to missional and relational discipleship.

In the bee colony, discipleship through community, mission, and multiplication plays a vital role in the colony's life and survival. Before lifting the lid on our theological beehive, let's examine the sacredness and folklore of bees throughout history.

### SACRED HONEYBEES AND THEOLOGY OF BEEKEEPING

Honeybees have been worshiped by ancient cultures and used symbolically throughout history. Many cultures including Christianity have deemed honeybees sacred and used them as powerful examples of organization and productivity. One such example is "The Papal Tiara that has been used since the thirteenth century is made to resemble a beehive."<sup>144</sup> Austin Fife points out that "In the Middle Ages beekeeping became a near monopoly of the monastic orders and canonical fiefs, despite the efforts of the peasantry

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<sup>144</sup> Felix Beck Bodog, *Honey and Health: A Nutritional, Medicinal and Historical Commentary*, (New York: R.M. McBride and Co, 1958), 714-715.

to protect their only source of sweets—their bees—by rites, beliefs, and practices which wedded them to the family more closely than any of the other domestic animals.”<sup>145</sup>

These insects have intrigued many and frightened many more. Modern day researchers explore the wonder of honeybees and attempt to grasp their overall significance. Lisa Jean Moore and Mary Kosut observe, “we continuously grapple with the human practice of seeing bees as signifying something else, through metaphor, and approach an ontological reckoning with the insect.”<sup>146</sup> This research, by and large, is a “reckoning” and reconciliation with the honeybee insect.

One of the earliest sources for understanding the nature of honeybees is found in a poem by Publius Vergilius Maro (Vergil). The poem was translated in to English by R. M. Millington in 1870. Vergil was born in October of 70 B. C.

*The Fourth Georgic of Vergil*

But when the golden sun has put to flight  
 And driven winter down, when summer light  
 Has once again unloos'd the frost bound sky,  
 At once through grove and woodland glade  
     They fly;  
 The sweets from all the gay-hued flowers cull,-  
 A tiny draught sip from the streams; or, full  
 Of some deep joy, keep all their nestlings warm  
 And give them food; then skilfully they form  
 New cells, and frame the clinging honey-store.  
 When from the hive thou see'st the Swarm forth  
     Pour,-  
 When like dim clouds that float through summer air,  
 Amaz'd, thou gazest at their flight, take care  
 To watch them closely; they will ever fly  
 To some sweet stream, some leafy canopy,

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<sup>145</sup> Austin Fife, “Christian Swarm Charms from the Ninth to the Nineteenth Centuries Author(s),” *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 7, No. 304 (Apr.-Jun., 1964): 154-159, accessed August 20, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/537564>

<sup>146</sup> Lisa Jean Moore and Mary Kosut. *Buzz: Urban Beekeeping and the Power of the Bee*, (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 18.

And there upon the branches of some tree  
 Rub thou the scent of plants now told by me:

Bruis'd balm and common honey-wort:-the sound  
 Of bells or clashing steel stir up:-around  
 Beat loud the cymbals of great Cybele.  
 Then gladly will they settle of the tree  
 Thus rubb'd, and gladly in the bee's own way  
 Hide in the hive's recess."<sup>147</sup>

The poem is about the nature and seasons of beekeeping. The section of the poem above indicates the spring swarming season of honeybees. In poetry form, Vergil supplies one of the earliest manuals for beekeeping. "When Vergil wrote about the bees in the Georgics, he enters into their life so heartily that we feel he must have been brought up among them."<sup>148</sup> Hilda Ransome also observes, "What veneration and yet what fear these tiny creatures excited in man! They exercise a fascination even on those who fear their sting, and all who tend them have quite a peculiar love and regard for them which they do not feel for other animals and which is a bond of union between all beekeepers; they feel that they belong to a fraternity which reckons Vergil among their number."<sup>149</sup>

Vernon Kellogg wrote a children's novel about the honey bee. The novel is about the new life one can have through the story of a honey bee. The life stages of a honeybee's life are accurately captured through the experiences of "Nuova"<sup>150</sup> (new bee). Williams Shakespeare also understood the intrinsic value of honeybees. He writes:

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<sup>147</sup> Vergil, *The Fourth Georgic of Vergil, Containing An Account of the Treatment of Bees, The Story of Aristaeus and His Bees, The Episode of Orpheus and Eurydice; and An Article on The Gladiators*, trans. R.M. Millington (London: Printed By W.H. and L. Collingridge, 1870), lines 77-99.

<sup>148</sup> Hilda M. Ransome, *The Sacred Bee in Ancient Times and Folklore*, (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937) 84.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>150</sup> Vernon Kellogg, *Nuova or The New Bee: A Story of Children of Five to Fifty*, (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920), 1.

So work the honey bees,  
 Creatures that by a rule in nature teach  
 The art of order to a peopled kingdom;  
 They have a king and officer of sorts;  
 Where some like magistrates, remain at home,  
 Others like merchants venture trade abroad;  
 Others like soldiers armed in their stings,  
 Make boot upon the summer's velvet buds;  
 Which pillage they with merry march bring home  
 To the royal tent of their emperor:  
 Who, busied in his majesty, surveys  
 The singing masons building roofs of gold,  
 The civil citizens kneading up the honey,  
 The poor mechanic porters crowding in  
 Their heavy burdens at this narrow gate,  
 The sad-eyed justice, with his surly hum,  
 Delivering o'er to executor pale  
 The lazy yawning drones.<sup>151</sup>

Children's stories, poems, histories and even hymns have been written to express the importance of honeybees. A hymn by Isaac Watts is a good example of a more modern praise of the honeybee.

“How doth the little busy bee  
 Improve each shining hour  
 And gather honey all the day  
 From each opening flower.”<sup>152</sup>

Saint Ambrose is one of the recognized saints of the Catholic Church. The biography and legends surrounding Ambrose are worthy of inclusion here. “The title *Honey Tongued Doctor* was initially bestowed on Ambrose because of his speaking and preaching ability; this led to the use of a beehive and bees in his iconography, symbols which also indicate wisdom. This led to his association with bees, beekeepers, chandlers,

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<sup>151</sup> Shakespeare, *King Henry the Fifth*, I, ii, lines 187-204.

<sup>152</sup> Isaac Watts, “How Doth the Little Busy Bee,” *poets.org*, accessed November 20, 2014, <http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/how-doth-little-busy-bee>

wax\_refiners, etc.”<sup>153</sup> According to folklore and legend, when Saint Ambrose was an infant a swarm of honeybees landed on his face and emitted a drop of honey on his tongue. As a result, he was dubbed the patron saint of beekeeping. “Ambrose was prepared for a public career in the Roman Empire by the best training available, which included legal studies, and that he carried on administrative work for some time in which he became familiar with legal usage, so that even after his change of profession it was but natural that the legal influence should be apparent .”<sup>154</sup> As it turns out, God had different plans for Ambrose.

Honeybees have also been a great example of virtue and productivity. Sister M. Theresa of the Cross Springer indicates, “Virginity is an enclosed garden and a heap of wheat, and virgins are exhorted to be like bees in continence and in industry.”<sup>155</sup> The continence of bees to virgins originates with Vergil.<sup>156</sup>

One of the best sources for the sacredness of honeybees in pre-Christian and Christian culture is a dissertation by Austin Fife. Fife writes about the sacredness and unifying theme found throughout history. He writes,

While there is a certain variety in the earliest existing forms of bee, honey, and wax lore, there is a single unifying concept that has dominated the greater part of the world’s folklore and mythology concerning them. That unifying concept is that the bee and the two extremely useful products which it furnishes for mankind—honey and beeswax—are sacred objects. This universal concept of the

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<sup>153</sup> “Patrons of Bees,” Patrons of the Faith, *Saints.SQPN.com*. 12 September 2013. Web. 11 accessed September 2014, <http://saints.sqpn.com/patrons-of-bees/>

<sup>154</sup> Lois Miles Zucker, *S. Ambrosii: De Tobia*, “A Commentary, with an Introduction and Translation,” (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 1933), 19.

<sup>155</sup> Sister M. Theresa of the Cross Springer, “Nature-Imagery in the Works of Saint Ambrose,” (PhD diss., Catholic University of America), 137.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

sacredness of bees, honey, and wax seems to result essentially from the utility of honey as a food for man.<sup>157</sup>

Beekeeping has been in existence for centuries. “The earliest absolute proof of domestic bee culture is not to be found, however, until 2600 B. C. On a wall of the Temple of the Sun built by Ne-User-Re (fifth dynasty) at Abusir, Egypt, there is a relief which illustrates an advanced type of bee culture that could have existed only after several centuries of earlier and more primitive culture.”<sup>158</sup> Fife also observes, “Let us remember, also, that the use of the bee as a symbol of kingly power, which dates from the first Egyptian dynasty, implies a knowledge of the natural history of bees which could scarcely be obtained except from a close observation of the social life of bees, and hence in artificially prepared hives.”<sup>159</sup>

Honeybees have inspired, been symbolically used, and been labeled sacred. Fife notes, “The cult of the sacred honey was expressed in the concept of its heavenly origin, in its prestige as the food and drink of gods, in its use as an article of sacrifice to gods and to the dead, in its use, frequently with milk or butter, in birth, circumcision, marriage, purification and death rites, in its medical uses, in embalming and as a bringer of the gifts of wisdom, eloquence, prophecy, and the poetic arts.”<sup>160</sup>

In early Christian rites of passage honey was a powerful symbol of hope.” One of the oldest and at the same time one of the most intimate incursions of honey into the Christian cult is its use, mixed with milk, in the first communion of the neophyte

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<sup>157</sup> Fife, 485.

<sup>158</sup> Austin E. Fife, “The Concept of the Sacredness of Bees, Honey and Wax in Christian Popular Tradition,” (PhD diss., Sanford University, June, 1939), 169.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 485-486.



performed immediately after his entrance into the Church through baptism.”<sup>161</sup> Fife also notes, “The mixture of milk and honey symbolizes the land of promise.”<sup>162</sup>

Austin Fife, Hilda Ransome and few other minor contributors are on a short list of persons who have researched and written about the history, symbolism and sacredness of bees in numerous cultures. Among the sources Austin Fife produced one of the best. Their contributions have aided in developing a theology of beekeeping which informs the practice of discipleship.

### THEOLOGY OF BEEKEEPING

To help us transition to a theology of beekeeping, a passage from Austin Fife’s dissertation will be included. The passage highlights the connection of the Hebrew people with the sacredness of bees. We see the sweet symbolism found in the biblical story of Sampson and his lion, in the two Deborah’s stories in the Old Testament. Fife writes:

The most interesting Old Testament tradition about the bee is contained in the legend of Deborah, the prophetess and judge of the Jewish people. Her story presents the clearest example of the metaphorical nature of the Hebrew tradition, and most surprising parallels with the Greek bee-nymph and bee priestess lore. Now first of all we must remember that the name Deborah is the Hebrew word for bee, and that is derivative of the word debash, ‘honey’.

In the first place, there are two Deborah’s in the old testament: Deborah who was the nurse for Rebekah, and she who was a prophetess and judge (Genesis 24:59). A woman whose name is “bee” is the nurse of the lovely Rebekah and accompanied her when she went away to become the bride of Isaac. This nurse is an important enough personage to have her name mentioned, her death and burial recorded, and to have a river and the oak tree beneath which she was buried

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<sup>161</sup> Fife, “The Concept of the Sacredness of Bees, Honey and Wax in Christian Popular Tradition.” 169.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 170.

named after her. More-over, it is significant that this bee-nurse (i. e., nymph) is buried under an oak tree.”<sup>163</sup>

The two Deborah’s are significant personalities in the Old Testament, as Fife suggests. Fife also gives us additional commentary on the Deborah’s and unlocks the embedded symbolism and sacredness of honeybees. He writes:

“But let us now examine the story of the other Deborah, for it will furnish us with equally significant facts. Here we have a “bee” who is a prophetess and judge of the Hebrew people. She dwelt under a sacred tree, although in this case it is a palm not an oak. Like her predecessor the nurse of Rebekah, she is from Beth-el. And at this point it is interesting to note (Genesis 28:19) that Beth-el, which means ‘the house of God’ was a city whose former name was Luz, ‘almond tree’ and had been changed by Jacob. The Children of Israel come up to her for judgment; she is inspired by God to incite the children of Israel to war against the Canaanites, is successful in the campaign, and sings a song of triumph and praise of God when the battle is over. No legend I have found is more filled with bee mythology and bee symbolism than this, and few Biblical episodes have such a close parallels in Indo-European tradition. Here we have a bee that is an intermediary between God and his people, a bee that is a prophet and sage, and a bee that is endowed with a gift of poetry and eloquence.”<sup>164</sup>

The two Deborah’s are powerful stories which reconnect the sacredness of bees with human roles, namely, nurse and prophet. The honeybee is born and assumes its first role, nurse. The first Deborah (bee) is a powerful and needed nurse and guide to Rebecca. Said another way, the first Deborah is a mentor, guide and a maturing agent in the life of Rebecca. In short, the bee is a symbolic guide. The second Deborah is a mouth piece for God. As Fife suggests, the prophet Deborah (bee) is an “intermediary between God and his people.” It is suggestive that honeybees are intermediaries between us and God.

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<sup>163</sup> Fife, 156-157.

<sup>164</sup> Fife, 158-159.

Through honeybees (God's creation and revelation) we can know God and his will. Said another way, God speaks to us through honeybees!

A theology of beekeeping has its origin in a Trinitarian understanding of God. God is one in three persons. God the Creator showed up through his creation in the person of Jesus to save his creation. In ancient literature, Jesus Christ has been referred to as "the bee" and his mother "the paradise of delight on which the bee feeds."<sup>165</sup> Jesus Christ (the bee) is the "intermediary between God and the people."<sup>166</sup> God the Creator showed up in God the Son to reconcile his lost creation. God the Spirit sustains and empowers creation's renewal.

The theological hinge is the unchanging nature of God's essence. The very system God created and used to mature life that he had made, He also used to mature the followers he had chosen in the gospels. God's process for maturing life is revealed in creation, generally and honeybee colonies, specifically. Jesus's process for maturing followers is a mirrored image of creation both past and present. Those desiring to follow Jesus Christ can learn how to do that, partially, through observation of honeybees. Equally, those wanting to learn about the environment, love, connection, sacrifice, commitment, etc. can do so by observing honeybees. A theology of beekeeping isn't adequate, in and of itself, to save humankind apart from the special revelation that is Jesus Christ. However, the study of honeybees is revelatory and gives us a window to view the Creator and his system for maturing life. A theology of beekeeping leads us to see the source of love and connectivity of God and his people.

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<sup>165</sup> James George Roche Forlong, *Faith of Men: A Cyclopaedia of Religions*. (London, 1906). 271..

<sup>166</sup> Fife, 159

According to Genesis 1, God commanded his creation “to be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth” and designed a system which perpetuates life. Genesis 1 also records God spoke the world into existence. Creation, then, is living and, according to Genesis one, the result of God’s voice. Honeybees, by extension, are God’s living creatures, spoken in to existence by his voice and sustained by the power of God the Spirit.

Honeybees were created to pollinate and feed the planet, provide honey for consumption, and provide a window to view the nature, wonder and systems of God. The honeybees and disciples of Jesus will undergo the same process to become fruitful and mature foragers for God. Disciples of Jesus, like honeybees, will mature by means of accountable and highly relational community and their incarnational presence in the world. This maturity leads to multiplication. A theology of beekeeping is a system of discipleship which relies on and is heavily influenced by an accountable community, incarnational life, and multiplication. The next several paragraphs will magnify the process of discipleship in these three areas.

## HONEYBEE COMMUNITY

A new theology of beekeeping includes the rediscovery of the methods and teachings of Jesus. Jesus’s methodology began with the calling of his first disciples as recorded in the gospels. Jesus said to the fisherman “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19, NIV). Jesus used a fishing metaphor (something these disciples could relate to) and spent the next three years training these first disciples how to catch people. In similar fashion, my desire is that this thesis helps make beekeepers of people. Jesus chose twelve men who he mentored and formed into a small

learning community that he taught to follow him. The learning and mentoring culture Jesus created in these twelve served to transform society and eventually, the world.

Likewise, a honeybee nest is an incubator chamber for bees to raise their young and graduate their workforce. As we will see, the colony is not the only place where growth and instruction happens. Bees have the most advanced yet simplest organizational system for rearing and missionally engaging their young.

One lesson we learn by observing this advanced system is their dependence on community. Within the accountable community the seeds of life are laid by the queen, brood (baby bees) are born and nourished within the colony, and then sent out to scout and forage for food. Community in a honeybee colony is essential to survival and fruitfulness. Hardwired in every bee is a sense of community obligation and contribution. The colony produces 80-150 pounds of honey annually because the colony has a common purpose and each member works tirelessly to fulfill its mission. Honeybees exemplify an accountable community—a characteristic Jesus also requires of a discipling culture. In the parable of the shrewd manager Jesus calls a rich man to task for “wasting his possessions” (Luke 16:1-2, NIV). A central focus in Jesus’s discipleship asked followers “to give an account” for what they were doing. The church also has to give an account for its management. In the honeybee community the workers raise their young and prepare them to be foragers or collectors. Foraging bees that return to the colony without food stores are immediately turned around by the guards and sent back out. In the colonized bee world it isn’t acceptable to be nonproducers. Community could not exist in the colony without foraging efforts. Likewise, foraging could not exist without nursing the young in the colony.

The true heart of community is the sacrificial nature of the colony. The goal of the colony is to collect enough food to survive the winter. Bees will sacrifice their lives and deny themselves for the sake of the mission of perpetuating their species. To make sure the colony survives and flourishes, every worker will literally work itself to death. Every worker bee is also equipped with a stinger and will sacrifice its life, if necessary, for the sake of the whole. The theme of sacrificial acts is a common thread within God's created order and the redemptive story of Jesus Christ. Sacrifices such as these make life possible. The old adage "death begets life" is the hallmark of honeybees.

A hive not engaging in its mission to collect food for the colony ends up dying. Three weeks after birth, "worker bees that are tasked to forage for nectar and pollen begin their orientation flights (directional imprinting). When you buy your first hive and colony, you will notice some bees near the entrance of the hive, circling around and going back to the entrance repeatedly. This is the orientation flight."<sup>167</sup> The bees are learning how to become foragers by actually taking flight. The colony of honeybees can't survive without the highly social community that graduates its workforce to the field. We turn now to the incarnational posture of the hive.

## INCARNATIONAL HIVE

Foraging is the colony's missional posture. Every creature God makes only advances in this missional posture. While collecting food for the colony, the bees inadvertently pollinate the flowers they land on. The only way for the colony and the world to survive is if the young are raised and sent forth from the nest. If bees fail at

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<sup>167</sup> Jones, *Apiculture and Beekeeping Simplified*, Kindle location 577.

foraging, they starve to death. If the bees don't attend to their jobs in and out of the hive, the colony will collapse. The mission of any colony of honeybees is to perpetuate or replicate their kind, which helps sustain life on Earth. In order to accomplish their mission they collect as much food as they can to raise offspring and store for nonproducing times.

The difference between a strong and growing colony and a dying hive of bees is a breakdown in the highly advanced social system. A hive can quickly change with an introduction of a pest called Varroa Mite. The mite attaches to the bee and eventually sucks the bee dry. The mites breed within the hive and quickly multiply and begin killing off the population. Foragers return to former nest responsibilities because many larvae and their nurse bees have been compromised by the Varroa Mite. The hive begins to lose its numbers unless it is treated by a beekeeper. Without intervention, a colony can shrink to a point of no return. It loses its missional influence, has a complete social breakdown, and eventually dies.

The bee metaphor is helpful for evaluating the church's health. Comparing the church to a hive of bees can help us understand the Creator and his purposes for the church. Without bees (Christians) moving into the mission field, the colony will never raise its young. In fact, without the missional component in a bee colony, the hive will collapse. The same can be said for the church. As we have noted above and witnessed, a loss of missional discipleship leads to what has been referred to as Church Collapse Disorder (CCD). The mission to pollinate the world with the love of God is the food that raises us as disciples.

## MULTIPLICATION

Multiplication is the final essential comparison between bees and discipleship. Every year the beekeeper treats the colony for mites and diseases, cleans it out, and inspects it for health. When spring returns, the colony begins to collect pollen and nectar, and the queen lays eggs again. The colony grows quickly. The hive needs more room so the bees won't swarm. Instead of letting a majority of the bees swarm out of the hive, beekeepers will often split the hive and take half of it to a different location. Rather than having one larger hive in early spring, the beekeeper makes two hives.

This process is strategic and allows for multiplication. Only strong hives get split. Likewise, the perpetuation of the Christian species is important to the ecology of the church. Honeybee colonies, like every other life form, were meant for maturity that leads to multiplication. The process of creation that leads bees from birth to maturity and multiplication relies on the abundance of food. Christians, like honeybees, need nourishment in order to mature and multiply. Honeybees and Christians find that nourishment when they are engaged in accountable community and incarnationally participating in Jesus's mission in the world.

## CONCLUSION

The seminal Scripture verse of this dissertation is Romans 1:20 where Paul writes, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (Romans 1:20). In creation God reveals himself and informs our faith. We must recover creation's lost voice in our efforts to restore the North American



mainline church to fruitfulness. While Church Collapse Disorder (CCD) is real, I believe there are imaginative and theoretical solutions. Rehabilitating a church that has collapsed on itself is possible if we recover Jesus's model of discipleship.

Although I may be suffering from what John Wesley suffered when he wanted to reform the church—naivety—I believe there is hope for the church. Whether I'm right or wrong is irrelevant. What is true is the method and content Jesus modeled to form followers is also evidenced in creation. We will need to replicate his model to develop mature followers of Christ. Restoring the doctrine of creation to its revelatory status can refresh our thinking on how creation informs our faith practices.

Considering creation as revelation has a leveling effect on the various hermeneutical positions, while the honeybee serves as a powerful image, symbol and metaphor bridging creation and scripture. God's apparent design in creation can also be applied to disciple making. The beehive illuminates a system designed to mature the bees. Jesus used the same system to mature his disciples. That system includes accountable community, incarnational life, and multiplication—processes revealed in both creation and scripture. Maturity, fruitfulness and multiplication are not achieved without it.

In the Great Commission Jesus tells his disciples to make more disciples. It was an invitation to a divine system to reproduce. In the end, the first command of the Bible is also the final one of Jesus's ministry. The North American church of the twenty-first century has forgotten how to multiply because it has lost the art and practice of discipleship. No doubt we are good at growing churches but not so good at maturing followers. By evaluating Jesus's ministry and imaginatively looking to the Creator's

honeybees, the church may recover discipleship and find itself “flowing with milk and honey” (Ex 3:8). Austin Fife’s concluding remarks in his dissertation of the sacredness of bees is worth repeating in summary of this dissertation. He writes,

The concept of the sacredness of bees is expressed in Christian popular tradition in the model they furnish for the good Christian life as a whole—chastity, monastic life, and various other personal and social virtues; in legends telling of their pious acts and services to saint and other religious men; in stories of their miraculous creation; and in totemic and moral tales, all of which ascribe to the bee virtues which place it on a plane above other animals. Confidence in their sacred nature is further expressed by a number of beliefs and practices which make them partners of man in the most intimate aspects of the Christian family life. This spiritual fellowship of bees and man is expressed in a number of ways: in the concept that the bee is a corporal form of the Christian soul; in the practice of telling the bees of deaths, marriages, births, and in various other family events; and in various taboos, beliefs, and practices which make the bee a constant spiritual companion of man.<sup>168</sup>

One may ask why honeybees have lost their sacredness in the culture or why most people don’t know anything about honeybees other than they make honey and sting. A couple simple answers exist which may shed some light for us. “A final stage in the decline of all Christian bee, honey and wax symbolism has come in the last hundred years. The replacement of honey in the diet by sugar which has taken place for the most part since the time of Napoleon I has shattered the prestige of honey as a sacred food.”<sup>169</sup> As stated previously, the preoccupation of the church to defend its faith, focusing on the narrative of fall and redemption, may also account for why creation and its gift of honeybees has been overlooked as a serious revelation of God. The replacement of honey with sugar and the church’s preoccupation with defense of its orthodoxy has left the sacred undiscovered. Regardless of why, the church has found itself struggling to survive. If renewal and recovery is possible it will no doubt be in the ancient practice of

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<sup>168</sup> Jones, *Apiculture and Beekeeping Simplified*, Kindle location, 488.

<sup>169</sup> Fife, 165.

discipleship as modeled by Christ and his creation. The answers to our questions ultimately reside in the “sacred bee” of Jesus Christ.

## SECTION 4: TRACK 02 ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

### ABSTRACT

This document includes an overview of sections 1-3 highlighting the problem, reviewing proposed solutions, and offering a theoretical solution to the problem of nontransmission of the Christian faith. An overview of these sections serves as a transition to the artifact. Following the summary, the artifact describes the popular book anticipated as the result of this study. It will be titled, *The Buzz About the Church: Re-Imagining Discipleship Through a Theology of Beekeeping*.

### OVERVIEW

Section 1 delineated the nontransmission of Christianity's faith and heritage. Section 2 underlined key movements in recent history that attempt to respond to the subsequent problem of the decline of the North American church. Highlighted in that section were leading thinkers and writers of the emergent church and missional community movements. Section 2 also noted recovery of a Jesus template for growing or maturing followers. The rediscovery of story and the resurgence of the missional and discipleship components of Christianity have received renewed interest in recent times.

Section 3 proposes that the solution to the problem of nontransmission is recovering Jesus's practice of disciple making and creating a theology of beekeeping. I suggest that in addition to adopting the discipleship elements of accountable community, incarnational focus, and multiplication we must restore the doctrine of creation to its place of prominence. All these elements are necessary for discipleship to flourish in the modern church.

A number of current resources adopt Jesus's model of discipleship, are biblically grounded, and offer insight in to his methodology, but they are mechanistic and unimaginative. The theory and approach I propose offers a new perspective on how to make followers of Jesus. Beyond the mechanistic, creation is restored to its authoritative and revelatory status and disciple making is reimagined by observing and engaging the Creator's honeybees. The theology of beekeeping comes out of a revived doctrine of creation.

#### ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

The artifact will be a popular book on disciple making and will recover the system Jesus used to mature his followers. It differs from other offerings in that it relies not only on Scripture but also on beekeeping to reimagine disciple making. It posits that we can learn about discipleship by observing and interacting with the Creator's honeybees and experience a fuller relationship with God through such study and engagement. This system of making followers is predicated on three concepts: accountable community, incarnational living, and multiplication—practices that are also found in a honeybee colony.

The book's major message is creation's authoritative voice to inform the practice of ministry and by extension, spiritual development. Creation is God's living word but it has gone largely unnoticed as a major revelation since the time of the Reformation.

A central idea throughout the artifact is creation's authority to teach and channel grace. The processes within creation reveal divine design and supreme intelligence. The biblical witness can be challenged, undermined, disregarded and even discarded. The

truths found within the Bible are open to interpretation and reflection. However, creation as revelation, authoritative and informative for faith is ultimately undeniable. If creation had been regarded as a serious revelation 500 years ago, perhaps the church wouldn't be struggling with the issues and problems that run rampant today.

A central theme in both the thesis and book is that the God who created all things is the same God who showed up in Jesus. God's voice in creation, like the biblical witness, has spoken to us about making disciples. The systems and interdependence God initiated in creation were the same ones Jesus used in his ministry. Buried within creation is a system for nurturing and maturing life. This is the same process Jesus used to grow his disciples. Honeybees beautifully demonstrate this process.

## CONCLUSION

The artifact is theoretical as well as practical. After identifying the problem of nontransmission of the faith (Chapter 1), it outlines an operational and imaginative theoretical model of discipleship. With creation serving as both revelation and model, we may reimagine discipleship by observing, studying, and engaging with a colony of honeybees.

Following the introduction and chapter one's diagnosis and inclusion of beekeeping metaphor, chapter two delineates the sacredness of honeybees and a theology of honeybees. Chapters three, four and five orient the reader to the process bees use to mature their young and fulfill their mission to pollinate the world. The book is guided by the riddle of Sampson in the Old Testament. The idea is something sweet can come from

something that is dying. The dead lion (church) can produce something sweet. That something sweet is beekeeping.

The concluding chapter of the book circles back to the topic of CCD and the cradle of life. It proposes to answer the riddle and suggests that out of this very emaciated and sick lion of the church something sweet and life transforming can renew our theology and faith. The lion ultimately represents a people. Along the journey the lion met its match. However, through its death, new life emerged. Like creation and Christ, a dying seed and dying man, God brings forth new life and resurrection.

## SECTION 5: TRACK 02 ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION

### ABSTRACT

The following contents serve as a template (provided by George Fox Evangelical Seminary) for a nonfiction popular book.<sup>170</sup> It has been adjusted to accommodate the author's needs and includes the following:

- **Book Proposal**
- **Cover Letter to an Editor**

### BOOK PROPOSAL

**Title:** *The Buzz About the Church: Reimagining Discipleship Through a Theology of Beekeeping*

**Author:**

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**Hook:**

We can learn how to follow Jesus by examining both the Creator's honeybees and Jesus's methodology.

**Overview:**

The book covers three ideas found in both created order and Jesus's life and ministry: accountable community, incarnational ministry, and multiplication. Recovering the source of divine revelation found in creation serves as an undercurrent throughout the

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<sup>170</sup> George Fox Dissertation Guidelines,  
[https://foxfiles.georgefox.edu/SEM/DMin/diss/track02/trk2guidelines.htm#written\\_statement](https://foxfiles.georgefox.edu/SEM/DMin/diss/track02/trk2guidelines.htm#written_statement)



book. Readers will be challenged with a more comprehensive view of God and his process for making followers.

**Purposes:**

- Contribute to the conversation of disciple making.
- Resurrect and collaborate the doctrine of creation's voice with the modern conversation on discipleship.
- Fulfill a call to write.
- Raise awareness of the importance of beekeeping.

**Promotion and Marketing:**

Numerous books in the marketplace offer insight into Jesus's methodologies and offer practical advice on how to implement his template in particular contexts. This book has the potential to be marketed as a bridge between faith and science, revelation and reason. The primary audience is the mainline Protestant church. However the book would find acceptance and appeal in the agricultural world and beekeeping world where creation is deeply valued.

It is my hope that the reader or audience would begin to see disciple making more comprehensively and begin to see creation's authority to inform our faith. Finally, I hope this book will foster an appreciation for creation in general and honeybees in particular.

The intended venue for the artifact will be small groups who need a supplemental reading to discipleship studies. It will also be a useful model for those wanting to change the cultural narrative of their context. Lastly, this book could be utilized by individuals interested in disciple making who are looking for a more robust and imaginative approach to the practice.

**Competition:**

There aren't any books which merge theology and beekeeping. A few books deal with beekeeping and business practices, and creation and Christian community. They are the following:

Kostamo, Leah. *Planted: A Story of Creation, Calling, and Community* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2013).

O'Malley, Michael. *The Wisdom of Bees: What The Hive Can Teach Business About Leadership, Efficiency, and Growth* (New York, New York: Porfolio, 2010).

Seeley, Thomas D. *The Five Habits of Highly Effective Honeybees: And What We Can Learn From Them* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010).

**Endorsements:**

None as of yet!

**Book Format:**

Standard book format.

**Chapter Outline:**

The popular book will be a total of nine chapters and will recover a theoretical and practical approach to disciple making. Following Jesus's model it focuses on three key areas: community orientation, incarnational living and multiplication. These three will be intertwined and connected with the practice of beekeeping.

The introduction of the book will briefly introduce the decline of the North American church and tell the story of merging beekeeping and discipleship. The introduction introduces the riddle of Sampson and implies that out of the dying lion of the church we might discover something 'strong and sweet.'

- Chapter 1 – The opening chapter will underline the problem of a collapsing church, introduce the metaphor of beekeeping and give an introduction to beekeeping in general.
- Chapter 2 – This chapter gives authority to beekeeping by highlighting the sacredness of bees in biblical and ancient cultures. Naturally, a theology of beekeeping emerges from the sacredness of bees.
- Chapter 3 is the central chapter of the book revealing the cradle of life and the holy shape of a hexagon. Biblical themes are underscored and beekeeping and discipleship are merged together. The holy process of 'push and pull' as the central methodology of a beehive and discipleship is disclosed.
- Chapter 4 discovers the play found in a beehive and is entitled, "Doing the Dance of Discipleship." This chapter will specifically underline the need for the missional frontier. It will look at a bee colony's scouts and foragers and their collecting efforts and draw connection between them and disciples of Jesus.
- Chapter 5 is entitled "Chew Your Way Through" and continues the conversation about push and pull and the need to be accountable in our discipleship. The chapter also promotes the natural process God gives us to mature young. In addition, there is a strong emphasis on sacrifice as a fundamental component of a discipling culture. The component of sacrifice is found in both honeybees and Jesus discipleship method.
- Chapter 6 makes a strong case for incarnational ministry by observing a beehive's incarnational approach. Incarnational ministry is viewed as a part of the journey to help disciples mature.

- Chapter 7 focuses on multiplication. In the same way the colony must perpetuate itself for the species to survive, the church must also multiply. Multiplication is the end result of a healthy church. The Great Commission is realized by looking at the concept of swarming.
- Chapter 8 is entitled “Telling the Story of the Divine Beekeeper.” This chapter strengthens the connection between the Creator and Disciple Maker. It highlights the doctrine of creation.
- Chapter 9 concludes the book by revealing Sampson’s riddle. Emerging from a church infected by CCD comes something sweet, the cradle of life. This hopeful chapter summarizes the book.

**Manuscript:**

Approximately two-thirds of the manuscript (25,000 words) is available. Six months are required to complete the book.

**Author’s Biography:**

I earned my undergraduate degree in speech communication from the University of Texas and master of divinity from Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University. In 2009 I was selected and awarded the Eric Anderson Award for Evangelism in the Texas Conference of The United Methodist Church. As a pastor of twenty years, I have preached thousands of sermons and written hundreds of articles on the Christian faith and disciple making. I have been a beekeeper for twenty-five years. Through my experiences in ministry and beekeeping I am uniquely qualified to build a bridge between a theology of beekeeping and the practice of disciple making.

**Future Projects:**

There are three projects already outlined for future publication. These projects are embedded within the current proposal but purposely underdeveloped.

*A New Testament For Christianity: Resurrecting the Revelation of Creation.* This goal in this book is to reestablish the doctrine of creation as a forgotten, legitimate and informative revelation of the divine nature and purposes. It will collaborate with Scripture to produce a more comprehensive and robust theology for the church.

*The Aldersgate Street Project: The Return of the Johannine Descendants.* This book will be about helping the church recover from collapse by identifying and training the Johannine Descendants. The Aldersgate Street Project seeks to recover Wesleyan Practice of Disciple Making. The main focus is the fruit of disciple making. The fruit is a return of descendants of John Wesley.

*The Nicodemus Affect: Recovering From The Institutional Church.* Taken from the story of Nicodemus, this book proposal identifies the causes and challenges of an institutional church. Like Nicodemus, the book guides us to discovery of recovery.

Dear Editor,

My name is Matthew Thomas and this is a proposal for a non-fiction book on disciple making from a biblical and creation perspective. The book is about making disciples by both looking at the template Jesus deployed and a honeybee colony. For the past 20 years I have served as an ordained pastor in the United Methodist Church and have written hundreds of articles and preached thousands of sermons. I am also a fourth generation apiarist and have spent 25 years learning how to keep bees. I am currently a doctoral candidate at George Fox Evangelical Seminary and hold degrees in speech and in theology. The proposed book is entitled, *The Buzz About the Church: Re-imagining Discipleship Through a Theology of Beekeeping*.

The modern mainline Protestant church is collapsing on itself and has experienced staggering loses in both worship attendance and membership. The practice of disciple making is believed to be the key to help the church turn around. Countless books on how to make or spiritually form followers of Jesus have flooded the market. While very informative and biblically sound, they have a mechanical feel to them. *The Buzz About the Church* marries the practice of disciple making with the metaphor of honeybees and recovers a doctrine of creation as a revelatory source into the life of God. In addition, a theology of beekeeping is proposed.

I appreciate the time you have taken to review this proposal and look forward to corresponding with you on this project. I believe the market has been waiting for a book that builds a bridge between creation and the practices of ministry.

Sincerely,

Matthew Thomas

## SECTION 6: POSTSCRIPT

Every postscript is born out of a story and riddled with directional changes, adjustments, engagement with the material and revelations about the content and your own personal life. This is certainly true in my case. This project changed as I changed. In the beginning, I was only interested in a substantive research project on discipleship. When a friend suggested he was bored with my proposal but would be thrilled if I could somehow weave disciple making with honeybees, I changed direction. I spent hours looking for a connection between honeybees and discipleship and wrestled with creating a theology of beekeeping. I looked further afield to see if honeybees had a home in the doctrine of creation. Finding little such material, precipitated another change in direction. It was apparent this called for a systematic theology that revived creation as revelation. The authority of honeybees to speak to the process of discipleship would find expression through a renewed doctrine of creation.

The Albert Outler Wesleyan Quadrilateral provided the method to reclaim creation and propose beekeeping's process for maturing its young. It turns out that creation as revelation has a lot to say about the nature, plans, and processes of God.

The problem identified at the outset, nontransmission of the Christian faith, remained the only constant. The proposed theoretical solution was reinstalling a model of discipleship faithful to a Jesus's method. In addition, the metaphor of honeybees was intertwined with the practice of discipleship. While these changes in direction were significant, the most compelling changes occurred in the writer. I became aware of and familiar with our ancient and recent past, acquiring a greater understanding of the impact of significant movements and people in the history of Christian thought.

These course corrections were necessary, providing focus and paving the way for future research and writing in the areas of honeybees, discipleship, and creation. Because I continue to be fascinated by the connection between creation and revelation and the possibilities that revelation affords to foster change and guide the narrative, I hope to see this material developed further and available in various publications.

I anticipate additional turns and twists as this writing journey unfolds, yet my hope continues to be that these concepts and practices bring light to darkness.



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project was born several years ago and has taken a considerable amount of time to complete. All my combined life experiences and relationship have culminated in what is before you. The idea of creating a theology of beekeeping and marrying it to discipleship was born in the lobby of a Seattle hotel with a doctoral cohort I have come to regard as dear friends. Thank you my dear friends Douglas Witherup, Norbert Haukenfrers, Tim Wilson, Danny Russel, Rick Callahan, Patrick Sehl, Paula Jones, Rob Parker, Bryce Ashlin-Mayo, Scott Ness, Shane Sebastian, Kevin Glenn, Greg Borrer, and Len Calhoun. Love you guys! To the faculty and staff of George Fox Evangelical Seminary, thank you for helping me to dig deep and for guiding me along this journey of discovery. Thank you for making me better Loren Kerns, Clifford Berger, and Chuck Conniry. I am grateful for you! Another major contributor to the final product has been my editor, Judy Hagey. Thank you for your way with words. This project would have never come to fruition if weren't for my academic advisor, Phil Carnes. Thank you for 'pushing and pulling' me to 'bee' better.

Three years ago I received the opportunity and privilege of a lifetime when I was accepted into the doctoral program at George Fox Seminary. It has been a joy and adventure studying with you, Leonard Sweet. Thank you for discipling me and calling me friend. God is good at putting mentors in front of us and vise-versa.

When I was 16 years old my grandfather began to disciple me in the art of beekeeping. Most of what I know about honeybees and how to steward them came at his feet. I never imagined those experiences with my grandfather would translate in to my own personal love for beekeeping and merging the ideas I learned there with disciple making. I would also like to thank the other important beekeeper of my life, Art Thomas, my father.

To my parents, siblings and dear friends I thank you! A special acknowledgment and thanks to Whitehouse United Methodist Church for your love and support through this process. The ideas found in these pages took shape and found expression in your presence. For the people who have sacrificed the most I dedicate this book to you! For my dear wife Christina Thomas and my children (students), Noah and Emma. I love you very much

To my friend Tommy Rosenblad! Thanks for inviting me out on that Sager Street Balcony.

Matthew Thomas

## INTRODUCTION

The rapid decline of the North American church has many concerned. Since the beginning of the twentieth century membership in the North American church has fallen drastically. Losses in membership and attendance have created a “Buzz about the Church.” According to findings by George Barna, in one decade the unchurched population has increased from 24 to 34 percent.<sup>171</sup> In *Pilgrim Practices: Discipleship for a Missional Church*, Kristopher Norris tells us “for years pastors, pollsters, and academics have been signaling the death of the church, or at least the death of the church as we know it. Church attendance in most North American denominations is plummeting.”<sup>172</sup> There have been many attempts to identify the root problem or cause of the decline. Some, like Barbara Brown Taylor, suggest over intellectualization of the faith. Others clamor over influences like the Enlightenment, Gnosticism and fundamentalism as roots and symptoms alike. Some identify the problem as the Christian faith is no longer relevant or intelligible in its current thought forms to the modern culture. Regardless, “a 2001 survey reported in the *Christian Science Monitor* reveals that the number of Americans who have “no religious preference” has doubled from 1990 to 2001, reaching 14 percent of the population”<sup>173</sup>

Institutional tendencies of the modern church or me-centered, gimmick type churches, on the other extreme, are equally concerning. Many affirm the church has

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<sup>171</sup> George Barna, *The State of the Church 2002* (Ventura, CA: Issachar Resources, 2002), 17.

<sup>172</sup> Kristopher Norris, *Pilgrim Practices: Discipleship for a Missional Church* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), Kindle Location 140.

<sup>173</sup> Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), Kindle Location 277.

become the mirrored image of the consumeristic culture; offering flash but very little substance. In addition to diagnosing the problem many have offered numerous solutions. Recovering a missional flavor, enhancing worship and program experiences, leaving the mainline church or recovering a Jesus approach to discipleship, to name a few, are all responses to a declining church. Questions like why have people left the church and why aren't others signing up consume our time and energy. Other questions like, can the North American church recover and become a viable carrier of the gospel again, equally consume our attention. Beyond the relevancy issue the church faces, it also must grapple with whether or not the theology, doctrine, and practices of mainline and evangelical traditions, in past and recent history, are adequate to sustain the future church. Are our ancient doctrinal positions and hermeneutical stances partly responsible for the shape of modern Christianity? Undoubtedly yes! In our pursuit to defend the faith since Martin Luther, have we missed something in our spiritual pilgrimage that has the potential to renew the face of the world and church?

I am arguing the above diagnosis for the church's decline and the subsequent symptoms are correct but would add the church is failing or in decline because it hasn't handed over a comprehensive Christian faith. What has been passed on is a spiritually unsustainable religion. *The Buzz about the Church: Reimagining Discipleship through a Theology of Beekeeping*, fosters conversation and offers a solution to decline by studying God's honeybees and Jesus's methodology of discipleship, together. Basically, we will develop a theology of beekeeping where we answer the questions of decline and offer an imaginative solution.

Modern theology and practice tips its hat to acknowledge a truly transcendent God and marvelous creation. The Lord has given us more than just a beautiful creation to admire and protect. Simply posturing with scathing acknowledgment has left our theologies emaciated. Creation, as the spoken, and by extension, living word of God, has been often overlooked or marginally recognized to the detriment of faith development. God's creation was spoken in to existence and subsequently is living. The question that comes to the front when the church has spent considerable time, energy and attention wrestling with theological positioning is what has been sacrificed? One of the answers to that question is the divine revelation of creation.

In the beginning chapters of the book of Genesis, God spoke the world in to existence. *Ex nihilo* (out of nothing) God spoke and life began. The living God created living things by utterance. His first command to all creation was to do what he had done in creation, namely, "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (Genesis 1:28)." The creator gave his creation the means by which to multiply and reproduce. The seed, egg, and rib were the great gifts of creation. Continuation of life would not be possible without any of these three plus one more, pollination. The process of pollination makes the circle of life continue. Growth and reproductive maturity is the goal. The good news is God gave all creation opportunity to participate in his creation process. Creation truly is an authoritative testament to the divine disclosure. We see God's playfulness and wisdom in his world. Creation is the cradle of life, a new testament to the power, authority, processes and love of God.

Creation teaches us about God and the processes that serve to mature our faith. For within creation is the process of maturity we call discipleship. Likewise, the very

process and fundamental ideas of creation are mirrored in the life and ministry of Jesus. This is an enormous claim. It makes sense though. The God who created the material world showed up through the process he made. If we carefully look at the life of Jesus and his methodology for maturing his followers we will also begin to see the same process Jesus used was the one used when he created the world *ex nihilo* and the one he continues to use to bring maturity to life.

Jesus called twelve disciples and did life with them. They began the process in route to maturity and spiritual reproduction. Jesus would invest his life, teach them about his ways and Kingdom, set an example in word and action, and love them in deep abiding relationship. Jesus modeled obedience and grace, process and relationship. I believe Jesus was the greatest disciple maker of all time. He not only shared the life-giving message for the world he perfected, but also a method for transmitting that message. From a very small nucleus of untrained people, Jesus fashioned them to carry on his message and delivery system. Jesus didn't just leave us content for our nourishment; he left us a methodology to bring followers to maturity.

From the heart of creation comes a metaphor which reveals the divine process of maturing followers. We will raise the lid on a hive of honeybees to more deeply understand and experience the process of making disciples. You will be amazed at what you will discover about God and connection from exploring a beehive. Of all the great metaphors available for telling the story of God's divine disclosure, honeybees fly to the top of the list.

What is recovered here is the methodology of discipleship Jesus modeled. However, this offering isn't just another mechanical approach to discipleship where I lay

out the strategies or nuts and bolts approach. Rather, it is an approach that marries Jesus' template with beekeeping. The goal is for the church to recover and hand over the Christian faith to the next generation of followers. As a result, it is hoped the reader will have a deeper knowledge of and relationship with the God who made it all and redeems it all.

For the past several years there has been a much needed resurgence in the subject of discipleship. No doubt one of the reasons for this rally is due to the decline of the North American church. As a result, there have been numerous books and articles written to address the return of the lost art of disciple making. This book is a contribution to the current conversation on how to make followers of Jesus Christ. It is both a theoretical and practical contribution with a twist. The twist is this book is guided by a theology of beekeeping. Since I am marrying metaphor with theology, it is important to communicate to you how and why I am undertaking this marriage.

Why beekeeping? Let me tell you the story of the how and why. The Christian life is a semiotic journey of discovering the fullness of the living God. On this journey we discover who God really is and who we are in relationship with Him. On the road the signs of His activity are illuminated. The discovery will take introspection and hopefully lead to fruitfulness. Here, then, is my story.

Several years ago I was attending a camp at my conference's retreat center outside of Palestine, Texas. I remember the day very well because it was storming and one of my colleagues and I were visiting outside under the portico. He mentioned this doctor of ministry program he was currently a part of. We finished our conversation and went our separate ways. A year later that conversation with my friend came to the front



of my memory. I went to the computer and began to research the program. The program is through George Fox Evangelical Seminary and the degree was in semiotics and future studies. I had never heard the word semiotics before. Its basic meaning is the study of signs. Crystal Downing once claimed that to understand the culture “responsible Christians must become skilled sign-readers, able to distinguish among diverse cultural powers in order to access their threat and respond appropriately.”<sup>174</sup> This book is an attempt to articulate the signs of God’s activity in creation.

After being spurred to enter the program, I signed up. The journey of a lifetime began and set this Christian on a course that would change my life. In this highly relational cohort based program with a leading mentor we set sail. The first year we met in Portland, Oregon and the second year we met in Seattle, Washington. It was in this second encounter with the other members of the cohort and my mentor that God revealed himself. In this group of seventeen we split up into groups of four to talk about our projects. Each of us brought to the table an abstract of what we wanted to write about. In my group were Rob, Norbert, and Doug. Everybody in the group shared their thoughts on everyone else’s abstract. I was last to get feedback. My friend Doug was sitting directly across from me. He looked up and said, ‘Matt, I’m bored.’ When he first said it I was kind of offended. Then he explained what he meant. It wasn’t what I wrote; it was the subject. The topic of discipleship has been on the modern church radar for the past several years and is a bit frayed. Everybody is tired of hearing about discipleship or spiritual formation. He finished his comments by saying, “Matt if you used beekeeping to

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<sup>174</sup> Crystal L. Downing. *Changing Signs of Truth: A Christian Introduction to the Semiotics of Communication* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), Kindle Location 128.

talk about discipleship, I would buy that, because it is interesting.”<sup>175</sup> Just as soon as it came out of his mouth, I realized God was speaking. It was a God moment; a true semiotic experience. This is the reason you have a book before you about discipleship and beekeeping.

While this is interesting, it is only a part of the adventure. The rest of the semiotic story is when I realized all of my life has been preparation for writing a theological book on beekeeping. The calling to write this was as strong and clear as my calling to the ministry. For years God has been nudging me to write on beekeeping. It was only recently that a holy marriage occurred between beekeeping and discipleship. My family has been keeping bees for many decades so honeybees have always been on the interest radar. I’m a fourth generation apiarist. I learned how to keep bees from my grandfather, Cliff Thomas. My grandfather and great grandfather learned from another of my great grandfathers, Arthur Banta (1896-1989), who got interested in bees while attending the University of California at Davis. Beekeeping like disciple making is something that is passed on to the next generations.

Like beekeeping, discipleship has always held a special place in this follower’s heart. But in my twenty-year pastorate one of the most frustrating aspects is the level of maturity that is found in the church. Disciple making, as Jesus modeled it, is by and large, absent from the parish.

Who would have ever bridged disciple making with beekeeping? God would! The bridge has always been there, but has been hidden from our sight. This less traveled bridge of nature, metaphor and story has eluded many Christians but, as I share in the

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<sup>175</sup> Personal conversation with Doug Witherup and other members of the doctoral cohort in the lobby of hotel in downtown Seattle. May, 2011.

book, holds something of value for all who decide to follow Jesus Christ. What we will discover when we lift the lid on the beehive is a new world and robust discipleship.

When I began the process of research and writing my goal was to write a book restrictively on disciple making the way Jesus did by looking through the metaphorical lens of beekeeping. What I didn't realize when I nodded to God was this project was going to have a broader theological scope and I would have to wrestle with the lion of biblical interpretation. I suspect when you make a claim that discipleship can be reimagined through a theology of beekeeping you will likely have to do new and groundbreaking theological work. This was the case for me. My hope is you will discover and be inspired as we reimagine discipleship in the most unlikely place. I would also hope that this book brings an awareness and love for God's creation in general and honeybees specifically. Let begin in an unusual way that will light our way-with a riddle.

"Tell us your riddle," they said. "Let's hear it." He replied, "Out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong, something sweet (Jgs. 14:13, 14 NIV)."

Sampson told this riddle but his audience didn't get it. Granted, it was a tough one. It is as tough as our dilemma of church decline. The answer to the riddle is the substance of this book. The recovery of the lost art of discipleship has been reimagined through a theology of beekeeping. Like Sampson, the carcass of the lion might just have something sweet for us to reach in and grab. Journey with me across the hidden bridge to answer the riddle of what is "strong and sweet?"

Matthew Thomas  
Starbucks @ Troup and the Loop  
May 16, 2014

## CHAPTER 1

### **CHURCH COLLAPSE DISORDER (CCD)/LIFTING THE LID ON HONEYBEES**

In the honeybee world the apiarists (beekeepers) don't really know what is going on inside the colony until he or she cracks the lid. She or he might expect issues just by observing the entrance of the hive. For the entrance of the hive reveals the strength of the colony but doesn't tell the story of its future. Only when the lid is cracked open does the beekeeper detect the true story. A distinct sound of buzzing wings is a beautiful sound. Deeper still, a true testament to the future vitality of the colony is only revealed when frames of brood and honey are pulled out of the bee box. While a hive can look healthy from the outside and even have the appearance of strength when the lid is removed, there may be pests or disease lurking upon closer inspection.

Honeybees glue their lids down so the lids, at a certain time of the year, make a very distinct sound when you pry them open with a hive tool. Before taking your hive tool and cracking the lid open, it is best to give the entrance of the hive a couple puffs of smoke from the smoker. The smoke makes the bees think their hive is on fire and the bees will immediately start consuming honey. When they do it makes them lethargic like you and I when we eat too much. Smoking the colony helps manage aggressive bees.

Under the lid lies a world many have never seen. It is where the beekeeper will discover the health of a colony. Just beneath the lid lies the reality of what is and what is to come. You can't really tell the health of a beehive until you investigate. Like a beehive, the church needs its lid lifted. It is hard to know the health of a church until we investigate the nest or its nursery. The nursery tells the tale. A colony of bees will store

numerous pounds of honey for the winter season when nothing else is blooming. One of the smells that permeates the colony and rushes out when the lid is lifted is the sweet smell of honey. Just under the lid are stores of honey or empty frames of wax. The smell we don't want to smell when we crack the top is death. Death has a very distinct smell. It smells like rotting larva. Most of us have heard about the drastic losses in colonies across U.S. Many entomologists and beekeepers alike believe the reason for drastic losses in colonies is due to a condition called Colony Collapse Disorder. These losses are stemmed by stresses on the bees caused by predators and various pesticides that infect the pollen the bees collect and eat. Many researchers identify the symptoms of colony collapse disorder. They write:

The winter of 2006/2007 witnessed large-scale losses of managed honey bee (*Apis mellifera*L.) colonies in the United States [1]. Those losses continued into the winter of 2007/2008 [2]. In the U.S., a portion of the dead and dying colonies were characterized *post hoc* by a common set of specific symptoms: (1) the rapid loss of adult worker bees from affected colonies as evidenced by weak or dead colonies with excess brood populations relative to adult bee populations (Figure 1); (2) a noticeable lack of dead worker bees both within and surrounding the affected hives; and (3) the delayed invasion of hive pests (e.g., small hive beetles and wax moths) and kleptoparasitism from neighboring honey bee colonies [3]. Subsequently, this syndrome has been termed Colony Collapse Disorder, or CCD.<sup>176</sup>

Bees are stressed beyond their limits because of natural predators, diseases, migration, and poisons. Beekeepers return to their colonies and find them collapsed or collapsing. Although honeybee populations and honey production have been in decline for years, only recently has the condition been diagnosed as Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD). The loss to beekeeping businesses, farmers, and ranchers has been devastating. While much of the disorder remains a mystery, strong indicators point to toxins as the

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<sup>176</sup> Dennis vanEngelsdorp, Evans JD, Claude Saegerman, Chris Mullin, Eric Haubruge, et al. (2009) "Colony Collapse Disorder: A Descriptive Study," *PLOS ONE* 4(8): e6481 (August 3, 2009) January 1, 2014, doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0006481.

ultimate killer. Several researchers observed that the loss of honeybee populations through CCD “involves an interaction between pathogens and other stress factors.”<sup>177</sup> Colonies weakened by pathogens and stress factors experience a rise of kleptoparasitism. “A kleptoparasite is an animal that steals food or prey from another animal.”<sup>178</sup>

The church in North America has experienced similar catastrophic losses and influence. These losses have contributed to kleptoparasitism in churches. Like honeybee colonies, our churches have experienced collapse due to cultural stresses, spiritual toxins and changes. Throughout this book, this condition will be referred to as Church Collapse Disorder. This disorder has created quite a buzz among clergy and laity!

Colony Collapse Disorder breaks down the highly structured and social dimensions of a hive and keeps the colony from its mission of foraging for food and raising their young. The end result is an unstable and collapsing colony. Likewise, Church Collapse Disorder keeps us from fulfilling our mission to hand over our faith to the next generations. Dr. William Abraham notes this collapse and observes what the decline of Protestantism “brings home to him is the crucial inability to hand over the faith from one generation to the next.”<sup>179</sup> Professors Kenda Creasy Dean, William Abraham, Leonard Sweet, the late C.S. Lewis, and a host of other scholars identify this as the pivotal issue for the church—passing the Christian faith on to the next generation.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> “Kleptoparasite,” Amateur Entomologists Society, accessed October 1, 2014, <http://www.amentsoc.org/insects/glossary/terms/kleptoparasite>

<sup>179</sup> “Billy Abraham on Engaging the Culture,” John Meunier blog, Accessed August 12, 2013, <http://johnmeunier.wordpress.com/tag/william-j-abraham/>

<sup>180</sup> The inclusion of these prominent theologians is meant to give weight to the argument. Kenda Creasy Dean has authored a book entitled *Almost Christian* and in this book shares her discovery that modern teenagers are being handed a religion called Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. William Abraham is

They suggest the church has lost its way, and at the heart of the matter, has developed an identity crisis. If they are correct, then the church will no doubt need to recover its identity, its heritage, and a vehicle by which to pass on the faith. The problem addressed here is the failure of the church to transmit the faith because it is collapsing on itself.

Just under the lid of a hive suffering from CCD is a decaying and declining colony. The smell of which is hard to stomach. The church is struggling to redefine itself in the postmodern world. It lacks theological clarity, is strained by hermeneutical approaches, and has lost the art of making followers. As a result, the sacred faith has not been transmitted and the church is steadily shrinking and becoming irrelevant to the culture.

When investigating the health of a colony the first place you go is the brood nest. The brood nest will reveal the issues facing the colony and tells the real story about its future. The brood nest of the church is its nursery and also reveals problems in maturing and graduating disciples of Jesus. A peek under the lid of the church also reveals a colony that is collapsing. We have experienced staggering losses in the mainline and evangelical wings of the church. Upon inspection of the brood nest we have discovered the social or relational makeup of the colony has disintegrated in addition to incarnational failure. These churches are marked by fewer followers and have no clear cut process for making disciples. They are sick. The smell permeating the modern church comes from our vacant nursery. Church Collapse Disorder is a very real and serious condition of the North American church.

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the Albert Outler Chair of Wesley Studies at Perkins School of Theology and has lectured and written extensively on the transmission of the faith. Leonard Sweet is also a United Methodist Scholar and has authored numerous books dealing with transmission of the faith. C.S. Lewis published numerous essays, one of which is *The Transmission of Christianity*. Lewis' Essay can be found in the book *God in the Dock*.

Diseases and pests which burrow their way into the life a colony are slow starters and strong finishers. Certain diseases like foul brood or pests like the Varoa Mite can wreak havoc on a colony if not inspected and treated early. Both diseases and mites affect honeybee populations and are debilitating in nature. With losses in bee population a hive's social order is disturbed. This disruption keeps the hive agitated and in decline until it collapses on itself. If undiagnosed and left untreated, the chance for colony survival is minimal. The key to strong hives is regular checks for disruptions. Investigate, investigate, and investigate is the mantra of beekeeping.

The lid of the modern day church has also been removed. What has been discovered is, in fact, the church is collapsing on itself. The problem of the modern day church not transmitting the faith to the next generation or sharing an alternative faith is, essentially, a brood rearing problem. Some predators and diseases have infected our processes for maturing disciples for Jesus Christ. As a result, our social order or faith-forming relationships and communities have been disrupted.

Some of the predators of the modern day church which undermine our mission and community orientation, ultimately affect our ability to mature followers of Jesus are many. The cultural insistence on individualism over community, affects' of consumerism's ideology, and the breakdown of family dynamics are a few of the cultural paradigm shifts the modern church has to contend with. When the culture and church are at odds concerning the value of each of the above, the result is a disparity in the same.

If the brood nest of a hive is broken, the colony can't survive indefinitely unless there is intervention. In part, this book is an intervention. The reason hives and churches collapse is because there is a social collapse. Social collapse leads to missional and



incarnational failure and overall identity crises. This is where we are as a church. Just under the lid is the smell we wish were different. It would be easy just to close the lid and move on to the next hive. Most beekeepers are keenly aware of the smell of rotting larvae in the nursery. Most of the time it is due to disease that disrupts brood rearing. We open the lid and see the social structure collapsing, the nursery in shambles, and minimal foragers returning with food.

A beekeeper can determine whether or not the colony is healthy or unhealthy, can be saved or not by simply observing the front of the colony and lifting the lid. Diligent beekeepers will check colony health frequently in order to catch problems early. If caught early, most of the colony issues can be remedied. The make it or break it variable is if there is a high population of bees in the box. The bees can recover, most of the time, if there population is high. If there is an issue and their population is low it might just be better to merge them with another colony.

Perhaps I'm overly hopeful about the future of the church and at the same time naive about its recoverability. However, I believe the population in the church hive is high enough to recover and turn the corner to fruitfulness. I also recognize that the majority of my readers don't know anything about honeybees except they can sting, pollinate, and make honey. Before moving on let me introduce you to honeybees. I know you want to pop the top on the hive and take a look inside.

## Introduction to Honeybees (*Apis Mellifera*)

Author Margaret Feinberg, in her book, *Scouting the Divine: my search for God in wine, wool, and wild honey*, interviewed a commercial beekeeper. She “realized that bees and followers of God have something in common—each has specific role to play in order to effectively serve a greater purpose within the community (and it might change).”<sup>181</sup> In her pursuit of the divine, Margaret began to explore something she knew very little about—honeybees and their contribution to the human race. Using honeybees as the guiding metaphor, we will weave the metaphor with the practice of discipleship to give us an imaginative and authoritative approach to disciple making.

Honeybees (*Apis Mellifera*) “have existed for at least 30 million years.”<sup>182</sup> They live in a colonized order with thousands of bees. Scholar Thomas Seeley observes, “for a honeybee colony is an immense family consisting of the mother queen and her thousands of progeny. It is also true that the many thousands of attentive daughters (the workers) of the mother queen are, ultimately, all striving to promote her survival and reproduction.”<sup>183</sup> The queen is the center of a colony’s life and “is longer than either the drones or workers, but her size, in other respects, is a medium between the two.”<sup>184</sup> The large social group is comprised of drones (male bees from unfertilized eggs), female workers (infertile egg layers) and a single queen. The worker bees comprise the vast

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<sup>181</sup> Margaret Feinberg, *Scouting the Divine: my search for God in wine, wool, and wild honey* (USA: Zondervan, 2009), Kindle Location 1658.

<sup>182</sup> Thomas D. Seeley, *The Five Habits of Highly Effective Honeybees: And What We Can Learn From Them* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010), Kindle Location 35.

<sup>183</sup> Thomas D. Seeley, *Honeybee Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), Kindle Location 87.

<sup>184</sup> Moses Quinby, *Mysteries of Bee-Keeping Explained* (New York: C.M. Saxton, Agriculture Book Publisher, 1853), Kindle Location 543.

majority of the colony and do all the work in and out of the hive, with the exception of breeding and egg laying. The drone bee's sole purpose is to mate with queens. The hatching queen will leave the colony for her nuptial flight. She will mate with numerous neighboring drones, eight to ten or more. The queen will store the sperm in her abdomen for her life and fertilize every worker egg she lays. Once fertilized, the queen will begin to lay her eggs ten days after her nuptial flight. "Each summer day, she monotonously lays 1,500 or so eggs needed to maintain her colony's workforce."<sup>185</sup> Twenty-one days later her first offspring begin to emerge from their cells. Every day after the twenty-first day, 1500 eggs hatch so the colony population proliferates in a short period of time. The new queen that hatches and mates is the daughter of the queen she replaced. Prior to her birth, the mother queen swarmed with the young bees. The young queen is now left with the remainder of the colony of older bees and hatching infants. The younger bees that swarmed with the already fertile queen will live longer and be able to build nest with the honey they took from the parent colony. Swarming is a natural process to perpetuate and multiply the specie. Honey is needed to produce the wax for the nest and storage.

A colony of bees carries out numerous responsibilities. One job is scouting. The scouts are female worker bees whose role is searching for a new home site. In a hive many scouts are simultaneously searching for a new site in which to take up residence. Once the decision of a new home is made, a large portion of the colony will leave the parent colony for their new home. Swarming is an instinctive process designed to keep the colonies multiplying and perpetuating their kind. Beekeeper and author Brett Jones identifies some reasons honeybees swarm: "1. Overpopulation or congestion in the hive. 2. An imbalance between old and young worker bees. 3. The hive is often overheated and

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<sup>185</sup> Seeley, *Honeybee Democracy*, Kindle Location 96.

the bees are unable to adequately ventilate.”<sup>186</sup> However, instead of letting the bees swarm, beekeepers will sometimes intervene and stimulate the colonies growth and then split the hives to make more colonies. Late beekeeper Cliff Thomas called this “making set-out’s.”<sup>187</sup> Beekeepers will also replace the parent hive and new colony with new queens. Younger queens lay more eggs, which helps the population increase.

One of the honeybee’s roles in creation is to pollinate commercial crops and flowers. Studies show “honey bees are the most economically valuable pollinators of agricultural crops worldwide.”<sup>188</sup> Other researchers affirm the “insect pollination is an important ecosystem service to agriculture, improving production in 75% of global crops [1], including many important sources of nutrients in the human diet [2], and contributing an estimated J153bn to global agricultural crop value.”<sup>189</sup>

However, they are not just to serve humanity through pollination and honey production. They are also an illustration of divine purposes, plans, and systems. Honeybees speak to the interconnection of every living thing and to the praise of their Creator. Michael O’Malley writes, “the organizing theme of the hive is that everything is done for the good of the whole, and the community is central to the operation of the

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<sup>186</sup> Brett Jones, *Apiculture and Beekeeping Simplified*, (Salt Lake City, UT: Alpha One Publishing, 2012), Kindle Location 1425.

<sup>187</sup> Cliff Thomas (1923-2007) is my grandfather. I learned beekeeping from him. The phrase, “making set-outs” was used by Cliff to indicate splitting hives.

<sup>188</sup> Deborah A. Delaney, “Genetic Characterization of U.S Honey Bee Populations,” (PhD diss., Washington State University, 2008), 1-99, August 5, 2014, Open access.

<sup>189</sup> Tom D. Breeze, Bernard E. Vaissière, Riccardo Bommarco, Theodora Petanidou, Nicos Seraphides, Lajos Kozák, Jeroen Scheper, Jacobus C. Biesmeijer, David Kleijn, Steen Gyldenkerne, Marco Moretti, Andrea Holzschuh, Ingolf Steffan-Dewenter, Jane C. Stout, Meelis Pärtel, Martin Zobel, Simon G. Potts, “Agricultural Policies Exacerbate Honeybee Pollination Service Supply-Demand Mismatches Across Europe,” *PLoS ONE*, vol. 9 Issue 1 (Jan 2014): 1-8, September 8, 2014, <http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0082996>.

colony.”<sup>190</sup> The honeybee exists for the betterment of the colony and gives its life for the community. As a “true social system, every bee works and sacrifices to produce an organization that is greater than the sum of the parts.”<sup>191</sup> Teresa Morgan in *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* writes, “Bees were widely used as an image of a model society. They are described as perfectly social creatures who subordinate their individuality to the harmonious whole.”<sup>192</sup>

All three Synoptic Gospels include the lessons of self-denial, suffering, and following Jesus. In Luke 9, Jesus told his listeners that, “whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it” (Lk 9:23-24, NIV). Such lessons are a part of community life. In the introduction to *The Disciple Making Church*, Hull observed that “the church systems we have set up protect those who profess from the intrusion of discipleship. We say it is okay to be a part of our churches without a requirement to follow Jesus, again because our gospel requires nothing of its recipients.”<sup>193</sup> Hull is spot on with his remarks. The Christianity we have been proclaiming is a cross-less faith. Meaning, we have removed the difficult portions that have to do with commitment, accountability and sacrifice. Without them what sort of Christianity are we left with?

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<sup>190</sup> Michael O’Malley, *The Wisdom of Bees: What The Hive Can Teach Business About Leadership, Efficiency, and Growth*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2010), Kindle Location 30.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Teresa Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 263.

<sup>193</sup> Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church: Leading a Body of Believers on the Journey of Faith*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010), 14.

In a bee colony every act is done for the benefit of the whole, and every honeybee is willing to make a sacrifice and deny self for the sake of the mission. The internalized values of the church should be no different. These are the values Jesus taught and practiced, even to death. “Jesus makes no apologies for his strong words. He wants people to be clear about what they are signing on for.”<sup>194</sup>

Honeybees are an integral part of the created order and as such offer an object lesson for the human race. Beekeeping speaks volumes about creation, God’s purposes, and nature. Studying the honeybee and its colony gives us insight into discipleship. I submit that we can learn how to follow Jesus by observing this aspect of his creation. In the same way Jesus used the metaphors of his day to articulate Kingdom truths, the metaphor of bees can help us develop a deeper understanding of discipleship through community, mission, and multiplication. However, beekeeping is more than a descriptive metaphor for the church and the process of discipleship. Beekeeping is a revelation of the nature and systems of God that informs our understanding of God and practice of discipleship. Presented here is a discipleship story right out of God’s creation. The aim of a theology of beekeeping is to help the church return to incarnational and relational discipleship. Can we recover something sweet from the collapsing lion of the church?

The reality of where the church is reminds me of a family story relayed to me. Perhaps this story will help us understand something about where we are as a church and how we recover. In 1911, a wild man was found in a cattle barn in Oroville, California, attempting to eat a calf. As you can imagine, this grabbed the attention of residents and local law enforcement. The wild man was starving to death and had made his way to the

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<sup>194</sup> Kyle Idleman, *Not a Fan: Becoming a Completely Committed Follower of Jesus*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 65.

livestock barn. It didn't take long to discover this wild man was a Native American. As it turn out this Indian man's camp had been found and ransacked by people who stumbled across it. They took his bows and arrows—his means of hunting. He was literally starving to death in the mountains and was in search of food. The wild Indian's man name was Ishi. Ishi had lived alone for many years when he was discovered. When they discovered him in 1911, they discovered the last “wild” Native American.

Ishi's ways, culture, methods, and life were studied by many from the University of California. After spending most of his life in seclusion, his immunity was ill prepared to deal with the onslaught of viruses and infections. He was sick a lot. Ishi died in 1916 from tuberculosis. The final five years of his life were spent telling the story of his ways and people. Researchers learned a lot from Ishi about the culture of his people.

Like Ishi, the modern church is starving to death. Our tools and means for hunting have been removed from our camps and lost to us. We are desperate for some kind of food that will nourish our faith. So much so, we have wandered around the countryside trying to find the next gimmick to ease our hunger pains. Like Ishi, there is a real treasure in our sacred past. There is a culture lost to us that once recovered, will help nourish the future church. That culture is discipleship. Ishi taught researchers a lot about his people. He passed on his sacred legacy in just few short years. Likewise, discipleship is a sacred culture which needs to be passed on to the next generation. Beekeeping also needs to be passed down to future generations.

I originally learned beekeeping from my grandfather. However, my father has taught me more than he knows about how to keep these tiny little insects. He learned how to keep bees from his father. His father, my grandfather learned to keep bees from Arthur

Banta. Arthur Banta was my great grandfather. Arthur became interested in beekeeping while attending the University of California at Davis. Interestingly, my great grandfather, Arthur Banta, our patron beekeeper, knew the last wild Indian—Ishi. He no doubt met him through the University of California. A priceless treasure was discovered in the foot hills of Northern California when Ishi was discovered. Will the church as we know it, like Ishi, be able to survive the infections and viruses the culture passes on to us or will this very lost and collapsing church rediscover the story of discipleship?

As it turns out, something strong and sweet is emerging from the dying lion of the church. That something lost to us is just beneath the hide of the lion. There is sacredness there, if we are willing to step a little closer and take a look.



## CHAPTER 2

### THE SACREDNESS OF BEES AND THEOLOGY OF BEEKEEPING

Honeybees have been worshiped by ancient cultures and used symbolically throughout history. Many cultures including Christianity have deemed honeybees sacred and used them as powerful examples of organization and productivity. One such example is “The Papal Tiara that has been used since the thirteenth century is made to resemble a beehive.”<sup>195</sup> Austin Fife points out that “In the Middle Ages beekeeping became a near monopoly of the monastic orders and canonical fiefs, despite the efforts of the peasantry to protect their only source of sweets—their bees—by rites, beliefs, and practices which wedded them to the family more closely than any of the other domestic animals.”<sup>196</sup>

These insects have intrigued many and frightened many more. Modern day researchers explore the wonder of honeybees and attempt to grasp their overall significance. Lisa Jean Moore and Mary Kosut observe, “We continuously grapple with the human practice of seeing bees as signifying something else, through metaphor, and approach an ontological reckoning with the insect.”<sup>197</sup> This research is a “reckoning” and reconciliation with the honeybee insect.

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<sup>195</sup>Bodog Felix Beck, *Honey and Health: A Nutritional, Medicinal and Historical Commentary*, (New York: R.M. McBride and Co, 1958), 714-715.

<sup>196</sup> Austin Fife, “Christian Swarm Charms from the Ninth to the Nineteenth Centuries Author(s),” *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 7, No. 304 (Apr.-Jun., 1964): 154-159, accessed August 20, 2014 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/537564>

<sup>197</sup> Lisa Jean Moore and Mary Kosut. *Buzz: Urban Beekeeping and the Power of the Bee*, (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 18.

One of the earliest sources for understanding the nature of honeybees is found in a poem by Publius Vergilius Maro (Vergil). The poem was translated into English by R.M. Millington in 1870. Vergil was born in October of 70 B.C.

*The Fourth Georgic of Vergil*

But when the golden sun has put to flight  
 And driven winter down, when summer light  
 Has once again unloos'd the frost bound sky,  
 At once through grove and woodland glade  
     They fly;  
 The sweets from all the gay-hued flowers cull,-  
 A tiny draught sip from the streams; or, full  
 Of some deep joy, keep all their nestlings warm  
 And give them food; then skilfully they form  
 New cells, and frame the clinging honey-store.  
 When from the hive thou see'st the Swarm forth  
     Pour,-

When like dim clouds that float through summer air,  
 Amaz'd, thou gazest at their flight, take care  
 To watch them closely; they will ever fly  
 To some sweet stream, some leafy canopy,  
 And there upon the branches of some tree  
 Rub thou the scent of plants now told by me:

Bruis'd balm and common honey-wort:-the sound  
 Of bells or clashing steel stir up:-around  
 Beat loud the cymbals of great Cybele.  
 Then gladly will they settle of the tree  
 Thus rubb'd, and gladly in the bee's own way  
 Hide in the hive's recess."<sup>198</sup>

The poem is about the nature and seasons of beekeeping. The section of the poem above indicates the spring swarming season of honeybees. In poetry form, Vergil supplies one of the earliest manuals for beekeeping. "When Vergil wrote about the bees in the

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<sup>198</sup> Vergil, *The Fourth Georgic of Vergil, Containing An Account of the Treatment of Bees, The Story of Aristaeus and His Bees, The Episode of Orpheus and Eurydice; and An Article on The Gladiators*, trans. R.M. Millington (London: Printed By W.H. and L. Collingridge, 1870), lines 77-99.

Georgics, he enters into their life so heartily that we feel he must have been brought up among them.”<sup>199</sup> Hilda Ransome also observes, “What veneration and yet what fear these tiny creatures excited in man! They exercise a fascination even on those who fear their sting, and all who tend them have quite a peculiar love and regard for them which they do not feel for other animals and which is a bond of union between all beekeepers; they feel that they belong to a fraternity which reckons Vergil among their number.”<sup>200</sup>

Vernon Kellogg wrote a children’s novel about the honey bee. The novel is about the new life one can have through the story of a honey bee. The life stages of a honeybee’s life are accurately captured through the experiences of “Nuova”<sup>201</sup> (new bee). William Shakespeare also understood the intrinsic value of honeybees. He writes:

So work the honey bees,  
Creatures that by a rule in nature teach  
The art of order to a peopled kingdom;  
They have a king and officer of sorts;  
Where some like magistrates, remain at home,  
Others like merchants venture trade abroad;  
Others like soldiers armed in their stings,  
Make boot upon the summer’s velvet buds;  
Which pillage they with merry march bring home  
To the royal tent of their emperor:  
Who, busied in his majesty, surveys  
The singing masons building roofs of gold,  
The civil citizens kneading up the honey,

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<sup>199</sup> Hilda M. Ransome, *The Sacred Bee in Ancient Times and Folklore*, (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937) 84.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>201</sup> Vernon Kellogg, *Nuova or The New Bee: A Story of Children of Five to Fifty*, (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920), 1.

The poor mechanic porters crowding in  
 Their heavy burdens at this narrow gate,  
 The sad-eyed justice, with his surly hum,  
 Delivering o'er to executor pale  
 The lazy yawning drones.<sup>202</sup>

Children's stories, poems, histories and even hymns have been written to express the importance of honeybees. A hymn by Isaac Watts is a good example of a more modern praise of the honeybee. He writes:

*How Doth the Little Busy Bee*

How doth the little busy bee  
 Improve each shining hour,  
 And gather honey all the day  
 From every opening flower!

How skilfully she builds her cell!  
 How neat she spreads the wax!  
 And labors hard to store it well  
 With the sweet food she makes.

In works of labor or of skill,  
 I would be busy too;  
 For Satan finds some mischief still  
 For idle hands to do,

In books, or work, or healthful play,  
 Let my first years be passed,  
 That I may give for every day  
 Some good account at last.<sup>203</sup>

Saint Ambrose is one of the recognized saints of the Catholic Church. The biography and legends surrounding Ambrose are worthy of inclusion here. "The title *Honey Tongued Doctor* was initially bestowed on Ambrose because of his speaking and

<sup>202</sup> Shakespeare, *King Henry the Fifth*, I, ii, lines 187-204.

<sup>203</sup> Isaac Watts, "How Doth the Little Busy Bee," *poets.org*, accessed November 20, 2014, <http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/how-doth-little-busy-bee>

preaching ability; this led to the use of a beehive and bees in his iconography, symbols which also indicate wisdom. This led to his association with bees, beekeepers, chandlers, wax\_refiners, etc.”<sup>204</sup> The folklore and legend surrounding Saint Ambrose maintain that when he was an infant a swarm of honeybees landed on his face and emitted a drop of honey on his tongue. As a result, he was dubbed the patron saint of beekeeping.

“Ambrose was prepared for a public career in the Roman Empire by the best training available, which included legal studies, and that he carried on administrative work for some time in which he became familiar with legal usage, so that even after his change of profession it was but natural that the legal influence should be apparent.”<sup>205</sup> As it turns out, God had different plans for Ambrose.

Honeybees have also been a great example of virtue and productivity. Sister M. Theresa of the Cross Springer indicates, “Virginity is an enclosed garden and a heap of wheat, and virgins are exhorted to be like bees in continence and in industry.”<sup>206</sup> The continence of bees to virgins originates with Vergil.<sup>207</sup>

One of the best sources for the sacredness of honeybees in pre-Christian and Christian culture is a dissertation by Austin Fife. Fife writes about the sacredness and unifying theme found throughout history. He writes,

While there is a certain variety in the earliest existing forms of bee, honey, and wax lore, there is a single unifying concept that has dominated the greater part of

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<sup>204</sup> “Patrons of Bees,” Patrons of the Faith, *Saints.SQPN.com*. 12 September 2013. Web. 11 accessed September 2014, <http://saints.sqpn.com/patrons-of-bees/>

<sup>205</sup> Lois Miles Zucker and S. Ambrosii De Tobia, “A Commentary, with an Introduction and Translation,” (PhD diss. Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., 1933), 19.

<sup>206</sup> Sister M. Theresa of the Cross Springer, “Nature-Imagery in the Works of Saint Ambrose,” (PhD diss. Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., 1931), 137.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

the world's folklore and mythology concerning them. That unifying concept is that the bee and the two extremely useful products which it furnishes for mankind—honey and beeswax—are sacred objects. This universal concept of the sacredness of bees, honey, and wax seems to result essentially from the utility of honey as a food for man.<sup>208</sup>

Beekeeping has been in existence for centuries. “The earliest absolute proof of domestic bee culture is not to be found, however, until 2600 B.C. On a wall of the Temple of the Sun built by Ne-User-Re (fifth dynasty) at Abusir, Egypt, there is a relief which illustrates an advanced type of bee culture that could have existed only after several centuries of earlier and more primitive culture.”<sup>209</sup> Fife also observes, “Let us remember, also, that the use of the bee as a symbol of kingly power, which dates from the first Egyptian dynasty, implies a knowledge of the natural history of bees which could scarcely be obtained except from a close observation of the social life of bees, and hence in artificially prepared hives.”<sup>210</sup>

Honeybees have inspired, been symbolically used, and been labeled sacred. Fife observes, “The cult of the sacred honey was expressed in the concept of its heavenly origin, in its prestige as the food and drink of gods, in its use as an article of sacrifice to gods and to the dead, in its use, frequently with milk or butter, in birth, circumcision, marriage, purification and death rites, in its medical uses, in embalming and as a bringer of the gifts of wisdom, eloquence, prophecy, and the poetic arts.”<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Fife, 485.

<sup>209</sup> Austin Fife, “The Concept of the Sacredness of Bees, Honey and Wax in Christian Popular Tradition,” (PhD diss., Stanford University, June, 1939), 169.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 485-486.

In early Christian rites of passage honey was a powerful symbol of hope. “One of the oldest and at the same time one of the most intimate incursions of honey into the Christian cult is its use, mixed with milk, in the first communion of the neophyte performed immediately after his entrance into the Church through baptism.”<sup>212</sup> Fife also notes, “The mixture of milk and honey symbolizes the land of promise.”<sup>213</sup>

Austin Fife, Hilda Ransome, and few other minor contributors are on a short list of persons who have researched and written about the history, symbolism and sacredness of bees in numerous cultures. Among the sources, Austin Fife produced one of the best. His and others contributions have aided in developing a theology of beekeeping which informs the practice of discipleship.

### Theology of Beekeeping

To help us transition to a theology of beekeeping, a passage from Austin Fife’s dissertation will be included. The passage highlights the connection of the Hebrew people with the sacredness of bees. Like the sweet symbolism found in the biblical story of Sampson and his lion, we find a similarity in the two Deborah’s in the Old Testament. Fife writes:

The most interesting Old Testament tradition about the bee is contained in the legend of Deborah, the prophetess and judge of the Jewish people. Her story presents the clearest example of the metaphorical nature of the Hebrew tradition, and most surprising parallels with the Greek bee-nymph and bee priestess lore. Now first of all we must remember that the name Deborah is the Hebrew word for bee, and that is derivative of the word debash, ‘honey’.

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<sup>212</sup> Fife, *Sacredness of Bees*, 169.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

In the first place, there are two Deborah's in the old testament: Deborah who was the nurse for Rebekah, and she who was a prophetess and judge." Genesis 24:59. A woman whose name is "bee" is the nurse of the lovely Rebekah and accompanied her when she went away to become the bride of Isaac. This nurse is an important enough personage to have her name mentioned, her death and burial recorded, and to have a river and the oak tree beneath which she was buried named after her. Moreover, it is significant that this bee-nurse (i.e., nymph) is buried under an oak tree.<sup>214</sup>

The two Deborah's are significant personalities in the Old Testament, as Fife suggests. Fife also gives us additional commentary on the Deborah's and unlocks the embedded symbolism and sacredness of honeybees. He writes:

But let us now examine the story of the other Deborah, for it will furnish us with equally significant facts. Here we have a "bee" who is a prophetess and judge of the Hebrew people. She dwelt under a sacred tree, although in this case it is a palm not an oak. Like her predecessor the nurse of Rebekah, she is from Beth-el. And at this point it is interesting to note (Genesis 28:19) that Beth-el, which means 'the house of God' was a city whose former name was Luz, 'almond tree' and had been changed by Jacob. The Children of Israel come up to her for judgment; she is inspired by God to incite the children of Israel to war against the Canaanites, is successful in the campaign, and sings a song of triumph and praise of God when the battle is over. No legend I have found is more filled with bee mythology and bee symbolism than this, and few Biblical episodes have such a close parallels in Indo-European tradition. Here we have a bee that is an intermediary between God and his people, a bee that is a prophet and sage, and a bee that is endowed with a gift of poetry and eloquence.<sup>215</sup>

The two Deborah's are powerful stories which reconnect the sacredness of bees with human roles, namely, nurse and prophet. The honeybee is born and assumes its first role as cell cleaner. Not long after that the new bee takes on the role of a nurse. The first Deborah (bee) is a powerful and needed nurse and guide to Rebecca. Said another way,

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<sup>214</sup> Fife, 156-157.

<sup>215</sup> Fife, *Sacredness of Bees*, 158-159.



the first Deborah is a mentor, guide and a maturing agent in the life of Rebecca. Drawing an inference, Deborah is a disciple maker. In short, the bee is a symbolic guide. The second Deborah is a mouth piece for God. As Fife suggests, the prophet Deborah (bee) is an “intermediary between God and his people.” It is suggestive that honeybees are intermediaries between us and God. Through honeybees (God’s creation and revelation) we can know God and his will. Said another way, God speaks to us through honeybees!

While the two Deborah’s are powerful symbols, where they were from is even more symbolic. Both hailed from Bethel which, as noted above, means ‘house of God’, However, also noted above, the former name of Bethel was Luz (almond tree). The ‘House of God’ is the ‘almond tree.’ The Deborah’s (honeybee’s) are from the ‘house of God’ or ‘almond tree.’ Even more revealing is almond trees have to be pollinated by honeybees in order for them to produce. Most migratory beekeepers move their bees all across the United States to California to pollinate the almond orchards. The ‘house of God’ or ‘almond tree’ (church) is pollinated with the word of God by the Deborah’s (honeybees).

Under every rock and tucked away in the most unusual places we discover God’s secrets and divine connection. Honeybees, as it turns out, are not a trifling insect. They are divinely made and purposed. They are powerful symbols and a revealing source of the power and nature of God.

A theology of beekeeping has its origin in a Trinitarian understanding of God. God is one in three persons. God the Creator showed up through his creation in the person of Jesus to save his creation. In ancient literature, Jesus Christ has been referred to

as “the bee” and his mother “the paradise of delight on which the bee feeds.”<sup>216</sup> Jesus Christ (the bee) is the “intermediary between God and the people.”<sup>217</sup> God the Creator showed up in God the Son to reconcile his lost creation. God the Spirit sustains and empowers creation’s renewal.

The theological hinge is the unchanging nature of God’s essence. The very system God created and used to mature life that He had made, He also used to mature the followers He had chosen in the gospels. God’s process for maturing life is revealed in creation, generally and honeybee colonies, specifically. The claim is Jesus’s process for maturing followers is a mirrored image of creation both past and present. Those desiring to follow Jesus Christ can learn how to do that, partially, through observation of honeybees. Equally, those wanting to learn about the environment, love, connection, sacrifice, commitment, etc. can do so by observing honeybees. A theology of beekeeping isn’t adequate, in and of itself, to save humankind apart from the special revelation that is Jesus Christ. However, the study of honeybees is revelatory and gives us a window to view the Creator and his system for maturing life. A theology of beekeeping leads us to see the source of love and connectivity of God and his people.

According to Genesis 1, God commanded his creation “to be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth” and gave them a system which perpetuates life. Genesis 1 also records God spoke the world in to existence. Creation, then, is the spoken word of God. Honeybees, by extension, are God’s living word and sustained by the power of God the Spirit.

Honeybees were created to pollinate and feed the planet, provide honey for consumption, and provide a window to view the nature, wonder, and systems of God. The

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<sup>216</sup> James George Roche Forlong, *Faith of Men: A Cyclopedia of Religions*. (London, 1906). 271.

<sup>217</sup> Fife, *Sacredness of Bees*, 159.

honeybees and disciples of Jesus will undergo the same process to become fruitful and mature foragers for God. Disciples of Jesus, like honeybees, will mature by means of accountable and highly relational community and their incarnational presence in the world. This maturity leads to multiplication.

The story of Sampson in the Bible is probably one of the best. What might his lion be compared too? Could the lion be symbolic of the modern day church? Is it possible that out of the dead or dying lion (church) something “strong and sweet” may emerge that will give life to the body of Christ and His world? Is it possible that out of our failure, Jesus, the great “bee,” could resurrect his creation to new and abundant life? Out of the belly of the lion, the cradle of life emerges and provides us something “strong and sweet.”

## CHAPTER 3

### THE CRADLE OF LIFE/HEXAGON OF DISCIPLESHIP

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so men are without excuse.

—Romans 1:20

The imaginative answer to the problem of (CCD) that plagues the church can be found in the cradle of life. Oddly, the answer to Sampson's riddle begins with the holy shape of a hexagon. Did you know that a hexagon is a holy shape, a life-giving shape? It is the shape of the cells in a honeybee hive. Thousands upon thousands of small hexagon shapes line the inside of a colony. They are all perfectly symmetrical and are made with wax secreted from the bees. Every ounce of pollen and honey is stored in these hexagon shaped cells. In addition to food storage the cells are also the cradle of life for the colony. Every egg the queen lays is deposited at the bottom of a hexagon. The nursery of a colony also contains multiple thousands of this hexagon shaped cell.

Creation contains that seed of imagination that enlightens the practice of discipleship. Considering Christ as a dying seed that brings forth life when planted in the garden tomb is a metaphor for God's connections and systems in his created order. In his book, *In Plain Sight: Seeing God's Signature Throughout Creation*, Dr. Charles R. Gordon magnifies this connectivity and reveals the Creator's divine design in what he calls "The Lattice of Life." He writes:

My parents built a chicken coop out of traditional chicken wire lattice, which has a distinctive pattern of interconnected hexagons. I did not realize it then, but this pattern is the most fundamental building block of life. Carbon Molecules naturally form the same hexagonal shapes that can connect like that chicken wire lattice. Carbon, the same substance in humble pencil lead and the most beautiful

diamond, is crucial to life. The reason why is because the bonds carbon molecules form are uniquely suited to form the basis of organic chemistry, and even DNA itself. And this pattern doesn't stop there. We see it repeated in honeycombs (how do bees know how to make those?) and in the covering of the eye in the cornea.<sup>218</sup>

Dr. Gordon creates awareness of the divine designer and the interconnectedness of all of life. Genesis tells us God created man from the dust of the earth “and that’s what carbon powder is—dust!”<sup>219</sup> The dust of the earth is the cradle of life and is the shape of a hexagon.

The image of God in creation is the image of a potter sitting at a wheel. The Divine Potter reaches down to the ground and scoops up the earth. The dirt is placed on the spinning wheel. As the wheel begins to turn, the Divine Potter begins to form man in to his image. No doubt a sprinkle of water is added in order to work with the clay. The dirt the potter picks up is carbon powder. Man is created out of the holy shape of a hexagon.

The center of life and activity for a beehive is the place where life breaks through. Emerging from the hexagon shaped, encased cells is the future of the colony. Baby bees have to chew their way to life. The struggle they go through and nutrients they eat, on their way out, strengthen them for the work of the colony.

God created life from a hexagon and remade it through one. The same God who created the world out of a shape took the shape of humanity. God became a member of his creation. His creation had a hard time recognizing him, though, and ultimately killed him and laid him in the earth. Out of this hexagon tomb life emerged like a tender shoot. What was denied our first parents in the Garden of Eden was now available to all

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<sup>218</sup>Charles R Gordon. *In Plain Sight: Seeing God's Signature throughout Creation* (Tyler, TX: Copyright by Charles Jordan, 2009), 159.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

humanity—the Tree of Life. Jesus, like a seed, died and was planted in the hexagon, the earth. What emerged from this shape was life.

The modern church lost its hexagon, in that it lost the hexagonal nursery of life. It has failed to reproduce its kind. However, the dying or dead lion may offer some hope for the future. God created life, redeemed it and can resurrect it. The church isn't so far gone God can't renew its life.

The divine shape of a hexagon represents birth and rebirth, life from death and renewed hope. The hexagon tells of a divine process, where life emerges and breaks through painful barriers. The hexagon is a divine process or nursery to raise followers of Jesus. The problem is the modern church has lost the process and community necessary for maturing disciples.

The theme song to the 1980s sitcom, *Cheers*, as well as the show itself speaks to our human need for community. We all long to be in a place where we are known and accepted—a place where everyone knows our name. One of the most famous theme songs in television history, the lyrics speak to our need to be known as human beings—a need we long for and find in any venue. The producers of *Cheers* created a show that struck the hearts of the listening audience, and the theme song brilliantly captured the theme of needing to be known in community. So familiar and popular, I imagine you started humming the words.

The modern day church has lost the vision of the ancient process of discipleship. As Dr. Gordon indicates, the covering of the cornea is the shape of a holy hexagon. We are not only born through a hexagon and find life through a hexagon but we *see* through a hexagon. We are born and reborn spiritually through the lens of this holy shape. Our

ability to see the world and the church with God's eyes will no doubt involve some corrective and hexagonal lenses. To recognize the modern church lives in a bubble and has forgotten its holy mission to make followers of Jesus is a step in the right direction. Bursting the bubble and expanding our view is necessary to fulfill our mission. However, cataract surgery will be needed to recover the true nature of discipleship. Community, mission, incarnation, service, sacrifice are the words and letters on an eye doctor's wall. Are they blurry to you? The hexagon of discipleship we are called to look through may have a cataract covering it.

If you recall, Jesus was always giving spiritual eye exams. The spiritual shape of many in Judaism was grim and in desperate need of a spiritual optometrist. On occasion the Great Physician actually removed the impairments. Judaism's spiritual guides were once referred to as blind guides by Jesus. The modern day church, like Judaism before it, needs corrective surgery to remove obstacles to our vision and repair our eyes. The hexagon of discipleship is available for us. It is just beneath the scales. Life is right behind those blurry lenses. Recovering the process to mature followers is found not only in the life of Jesus but also in his creation. Ultimately, the hexagon leads us to one of God's best metaphors—honeybees.

God created an insect that would be responsible for feeding the planet. Pretty amazing. Thankfully he didn't put us in charge of that task. We are only tasked with stewarding the hives. In truth, honeybees are the hinge of life. They are a metaphor which produces something life sustaining and sweet not only metaphorically but physically. Out of the bosom of creation God has supplied something sweet and nourishing for our spiritual lives.

Thousands of small hexagonal shapes line a beehive, with thousands of workers emerging from these shapes each day. The queen of a colony will produce upwards of 1500 eggs a day. She will lay them at the bottom of each hexagon-shaped cell. While she is doing that thousands of workers are being born, cleaning cells of the colony, receiving food, eating, feeding larva, fanning to keep hive temperature regulated for brood rearing, foraging, scouting and guarding the colony. Once the queen lays the egg, it takes twenty-one days for it to hatch out and join the colony. Every day after twenty-one, 1500 bees hatch out. The population proliferates rapidly in the spring as the hive prepares for the nectar flow. It takes six pounds of honey to make one pound of wax. The honey the bees collected previously is used to build a nursery of wax. The cost of honey is significant but necessary if the colony is to reproduce its kind.

Discipleship is a costly investment of a church's resources and time but a necessary one if the church plans on reproducing. In a hive you have to have the right temperature to raise bees. Equally, the church needs the right temperature of community and mission to raise and multiply its offspring. Perpetuation of the specie is built within the DNA of every living thing. Disciples are no exception. We were called to make more, so Jesus said at the conclusion of the gospel of Matthew. We were meant to multiply life.

Who would have ever considered the creation and importance of the shape of a hexagon? God did. Adam took shape through the shape of a hexagon. It is the shape God uses to bring life. Re-imagined, it is the shape that can be used to help renew life for the church. From the creation of man to the birth of baby bees God's will to create life is accomplished and sustained through a hexagon. This holy shape is the lens which will



help us see the God who made it all and sustains it all and has connected it all. Within this holy shape is a divine system that governs all of life and discipleship.

### Push and Pull

As mentioned previously there are numerous roles in a colony of honeybees. The first job a bee has when it is born is cell cleaner. It cleans and prepares the hexagons for more life or food. But it doesn't keep this job for long before it graduates to the new assignment of nursery worker. This is where the push and pull comes into play. Every day bees are being born and dying. For every crop of bees born pushes the ones born before to the outer fringes of a colony. The need of a colony to care for its young and forage for food are the two most important tasks a colony has. While newborn bees are pushed by ones being born behind them they are equally being pulled to the mission of the colony, i.e., foraging for food, water, and propolis. Bees are not born in the nest and stay in a nursery all their life. They are actually pushed and pulled to many different jobs. If newborns stayed in the nursery all their lives they would never make foragers and would ultimately starve to death. Making mature foragers is the goal of a colony.

Brian Johnson wrote an informative essay on the different castes within a colony during the nectar and pollen-rich season. He identifies four castes within a colony: "cell cleaners, nurses, middle aged bees, and foragers."<sup>220</sup> Cell cleaners are responsible for cleaning duties and typically stay a week in this caste. Nurse bees care for feeding larvae and queen and spend a week in nursery duties. Middle-aged bees are in this caste for 12-

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<sup>220</sup> Brian Johnson, "Division of Labor in Honeybees: Form, Function and Proximate Mechanism," *Behav Ecol Sociobiol.*, vol. 64, issue 3 (Jan 2010), 308, October 25, 2014, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2810364/>

21 days. Their tasks range “from nest building and maintenance, to nectar receiving and processing, to guarding the nest.”<sup>221</sup> The final caste in a honeybee colony is forager and ranges from twenty-one days till death. Within this highly social and accountable caste system bees are pushed and pulled. In so doing, they are transitioned from one caste to the other mainly through the needs of a colony. Johnson observes that “Bees living in healthy colonies in the spring and summer undergo three caste transitions: cell cleaner to nurse, nurse to MAB, and MAB to forager.”<sup>222</sup> The key word in Johnson’s observation is healthy. Unhealthy colonies with collapsing social structures confuse these castes. Unhealthy colonies lose the very system of push and pull and unless they recover will eventually collapse.

The church colony is not all that dissimilar from a honeybee colony. The church was called to push and pull on the young in the nursery. However, we lost the art of pushing and pulling (discipleship). As a result, we never graduated disciples from the nursery because we lost the measure of accountability necessary to push and pull. The modern church is declining, by and large, because this holy process for maturing disciples is lost to us. Just under the lid of what we expect is a diminishing church lies the root of the problem and a revelation of what will help us recover. The problem and revelation from inspecting the hive is a deficiency in push and pull. We might feel the pull to be missional but aren’t prepared for flight. We, like new emerging bees, are grossly underdeveloped and unprepared for the world God calls us to.

Growing churches are healthy. They are brooding and hatching out. There are numerous programs, events, electrifying worship experiences that indicate health and

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 308.

<sup>222</sup> Johnson, 310.

fruitfulness. Just under the lid and upon close inspection, another symptom reveals itself. To check for brood health, beekeepers will pull out an inner frame from the middle of the hive at the bottom—the brood comb. It is basically the nest or nursery. It is the great revealer of the future. Sometimes if disease is just beginning in a colony, a beekeeper may not detect it until there is already a decline in numbers. Through experience and to test the health of capped larvae a beekeeper will grab a frame of brood and give it a close look from front to back. It may appear to be healthy but needs an even closer inspection. A wise beekeeper will test the capped brood by taking piece of grass or small stick and sticking it in the encased larvae. If you pull the stick or grass out and it looks dark brown instead of milky white, the colony has a disease called foulbrood.

Growing churches may look vital and healthy. Close inspection might reveal the process of discipleship (nursery) is really diseased or absent. The church colony will be filled with underdeveloped and immature followers of Jesus. We can offer as many gimmicks, events, and programs we want to get people in the door but if there is not accountable push and pull, we are not fulfilling the Lord's call to make disciples. The hive might look numerically healthy, but just under the lid is a breakdown in the process of discipleship. The flash and growth will only be sustainable with more flash and gimmicks. If your church stops offering gimmicks why would people come there? Most will leave there and shop for another tantalizing experience. The consumeristic world has brilliantly enculturated the citizenry to be shoppers, selectors, or consumers looking for the best deal, most serviceable church, and tantalizing experience. Several reasons the attractional church is declining is gimmicks are expensive, ultimately unsustainable, and don't produce deeply committed followers of Jesus.

Young bees need pollen to eat because it is rich in protein. Obviously, they can't go get it themselves because baby bees' wings aren't fully developed yet. Pollen has to be brought to them by foragers. It is the forager's responsibility to collect nutrition from the field and bring it back to the colony so the nursery has food. It is the nurseries' responsibility to prepare the bees to be foragers. If there is a social breakdown within the colony and the roles of bees are confused, the colony is heading toward collapse. A social breakdown may be the result of disease, pests, or loss of a queen.

The push and pull of a colony is needed within the context of the church as well. As a disciple of Jesus is being formed and grounded in a relationship with the Father through accountable measures, they are equally being pulled into the mission field. The mission field, is where they will learn to forage and sense God's activity in sight and smell. As new sources of God's activity are found, they report back to the church and then the church joins them in the field.

Jesus pushed his disciples into the mission field. Luke 9 and 10 record the push Jesus makes to mature his disciples. They are learning how to follow Jesus and make followers by actually being incarnational in God's mission field. This is Jesus' design to mature his disciples. Experiencing success and failure would be valuable in preparing his followers, after his ascension, to bear the good news of his life. Post Pentecost the disciples would be equally pushed and pulled into the mission field by the power and working of the Holy Spirit. No doubt the need of the people would pull them to forage as the Spirit pushed them out of the upper room.

Honeybees are born in a push and pull environment and this makes them producers. The system which governs their life is the cradle of life for the world. Their

unique system has six major components to it: incarnation, accountable community, mentorship, education (breaching barriers), sacrifice and mission.

A hexagon is a six-sided shape and from this shape the cradle of life exists. Discipleship, as a process for maturing followers of Jesus, doesn't exist without these six sides. If any are missing from the dimension, the colony of the church will eventually collapse. If each of these is attended to in the life of a church the maturity which leads to multiplication will happen. These sides will be the focus of the next several chapters.

It turns out that out of the very weak and dying lion—the cradle of life—the hexagon of discipleship is emerging as something “strong and sweet.”

## CHAPTER 4

### THE DANCE OF DISCIPLESHIP

While discipleship takes the shape of a divine hexagon, it is equally a dance. It is an informative, transformative, and disciplined response to God's movement among us. Music ushers in our dancing and playing. In fact, all of creation dances and plays when the music of life starts. The image of two young white-tailed deer playfully sparring comes to mind. Both of them are dancing around on their hind legs leaning into one another. It is a beautiful sight to see. Two bear cubs rolling around and playing together is another example. God's creation is filled with a multitude of dancing, singing, and playing examples.

If discipleship is a dance, where does that leave the modern day church? Most would answer that question with shuffling. We often shuffle around in a hurry, offering "dance" classes on how to be busy but unproductive. It's pretend dancing or playing. We offer numerous gimmicks and attractional programs and events in the modern day church experience. Everything from bells and whistles programs to hip worship styles fill our buildings and worship spaces. We also offer a lot of Bible studies without a performance CD. Meaning little by way of praxis accompanies our intense studies of the Word. Very little is offered in the way of robust and comprehensive Christianity. Brian Zahnd, in his book, *Beauty Will Save the World*, makes an observation and offering. He writes, "The Western church has had a four-century experiment with viewing salvation in a scientific

and mechanistic manner, presenting it as a plan, system, or formula. It would be much better if we would return to viewing salvation as a song we sing.”<sup>223</sup>

Our churches are not, for the most part, dancing to the music of discipleship. They’re barely moving. God gave us one of the best metaphors in creation to help the church learn the importance of discipleship dancing. Make no mistake, disciple making is an eloquent dance, requiring form, play, discipline, and music. Learning how to dance to the music of discipleship is important if the church is interested in recovering and making deeply committed followers of Jesus. In this arrangement, Jesus is the lead singer and we accompany his lead. In order to arrive at the music that will allow the church to dance and play again, we need to rehire our lead singer.

The mission of the church is to make disciples. Jesus was very clear about that mandate for his recently created church. He basically told his disciples to go make more (Mt 28:16-20). How did a young Jewish carpenter from Nazareth plan to keep his movement going? The answer is easy—make followers who could keep the news of Christ alive. The more challenging question is what was his method? How did Jesus take the raw material he had handpicked and shape it in to something that could accompany him in his music? The answer is as old as creation.

Let me suggest to you that creation, as the spoken word of God, offers numerous lessons and sessions on how to be a better dancer and person of play. The early chapters of Genesis share the story of God speaking the world *ex nihilo* (out of nothing). Obviously, matter doesn’t predate the Creator. God spoke words and matter came in to existence and life came to be. His creation is the spoken word and is living. The God who

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<sup>223</sup> Brian Zahnd, *Beauty Will Save the World: Rediscovering The Allure & Mystery of Christianity* (Lake Mary FL: Charisma House Book Group, 2012), Kindle Location 108.

made the matter literally showed up through it and took on its nature. Mary had a little boy. Jesus was born to the process he had created. God experienced all that we do starting with womb life and coming through the birth canal.

Most rational people would agree there is a divine designer. And almost all Christians profess this God showed up through a virgin named Mary. The God of creation showed up for redemption in and through the fully human and divine Jesus. Let me offer a couple of questions at this point. Would God use the same process to mature disciples that he uses to mature his creation? If so, what would that process be? The answer to that question is the focus of this book.

When reading the story of Jesus one finds the discipleship process alluded to in creation. Maturity, in any species, is forged through the experience of living. Whether a fledgling chicken hatching from an egg or the same adult bird running for its life to survive a predator is necessary to mature the bird. Humans are no different. It explains why Jesus sent the disciples out two by two in to the towns and villages. Such an experience of success and failure would be a necessary prerequisite for future ministry. Experience is the great teacher. The process found in creation and in Jesus's ministry to mature offspring is formative and can't be sidestepped. The process itself has a goal—maturity that leads to reproduction.

Author and preacher Barbara Brown Taylor wrote a book titled, *An Altar in the World*. In her book she identifies numerous practices, one of which is the practice of paying attention. She writes, "The practice of paying attention is as simple as looking twice at people and things you might just as easily ignore. To see takes time, like having a friend takes time. It is as simple as turning off the television to learn the song of a single



bird.”<sup>224</sup> To reimagine discipleship will require us to pay attention to not only our lead singer but also what He has made. What we will discover is an altar in the world. This altar, unlike any other, is living.

For the past several centuries we have not been paying attention to one of the greatest metaphors or altars God has given. Tucked away in groves around the world and lining fields of flowering blossoms are one of the greatest gifts God ever gave his creation. What if I told you we could learn how to follow the Lord and subsequently deepen our faith by engaging God’s living word of creation? What we will find is a wealth of knowledge and deeper connections than we could ever have discovered without creation’s witness. Honeybees are an altar in God’s creation.

Did you know there is dancing in the hive. Why did God make bees dance? Let me suggest non-timidly—God loves dancing and music! Foraging honeybees return from their nectar and pollen runs and drop off what they have collected to middle-aged bees. When a huge nectar flow starts the foragers will return to let the rest of the foragers know its exact location. This vital information is communicated through an intricate dance. The dancing bee makes numerous turns and up and down motions to freely communicate the exact location of food. The information she communicates is also being communicated by other foragers. The information is freely shared for the advancement of the colony. The dance tells the directions. Remember the aim of a colony is survival and perpetuation of their specie. All information is shared collectively for the advancement of the hive. A colony has a shared intelligence. There are no secrets or misappropriation of information. What the forager is sharing is good news. This good news lies outside the bee box in the

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<sup>224</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), Kindle Location 564.

mission field. It is incarnational information. It is missional information. It is sweet music to the dancing forager. Other bees gather around the dancing bees to learn where the food is. The goal is to gather enough food to make it through winter. To fulfill their mission this vital information is freely shared. Like an army the foragers will head to the source by the thousands. They are mobilized by their need to survive. The pollen and nectar are stored and used to feed the colony when the time comes when sources are unavailable.

The shared information of the dancing forager is the key to life for the colony. So vital, if there is sudden loss of foragers communicating location of food, the colony will suffer. What would happen if the forager or scout didn't share vital information on their return to the colony? A more appropriate question for the church would be, what would happen in the church if no one paid attention to our dance of discipleship? Collapse? The way many modern churches work is they are engaged in meaningful information sessions (sermons, Bible studies, etc.). There is a lot of information given but little dancing. The foragers who do return and dance are largely ignored by the institutional church. I can't imagine that happening in a colony because they care too much about their future and mission to not respond. Transformation in a hive or a church happens when the information is shared through a dance. The dance is so impressive and charismatic it pulls the observers out of colony and into the mission field. The bees have one thought in mind, fulfill the hive mission.

Unfortunately, the modern church spends a lot of time comparing its ministry to other churches and competing for members. By offering stellar programming, amazing facilities, and exceptional and gifted staff, the church seeks to wow unsuspecting seekers with bigger and brighter. Do such means transform people into deeply committed,

sacrificial, generous followers of Jesus Christ? I dare say, they don't. Very little by way of discipleship is happening in these contexts. It can't, because enormous time and resources are allocated to attractional endeavors. It is more about servicing our clients than making followers of Jesus.

Beekeepers in certain parts of the northern United States deal with the diseases, pests, and other issues facing beekeepers everywhere. However, northern beekeepers deal with one issue that beekeepers in the South don't have to contend with—bears. Bears can demolish a bee yard and make a mess of equipment. Typically, after a bear comes through a bee yard and damages numerous colonies, a beekeeper has to put up an electric fence to attempt to keep the bear(s) from returning. Most people think the bear is after the honey. I suspect *Winnie the Pooh* has ruined us like *The Bee Movie*. Bears are not after the honey. They are after the nutritiously rich calories at the center of the colony. You guessed it! They are after the brood chamber or what we have been referring to as the nursery. The larvae are high in calories and will help the bears pack on pounds. A bee yard to a bear is a delicious, all-you-can-eat buffet.

Most of time an electric fence is not deterrent enough to keep the bear from coming in the yard. The beekeeper will have to find another way to deter the bear. Several years ago a friend of mine named Joe Hagan used a phrase that I will never forget. In reference to parents who have not prepared their children by sheltering them from the world, Joe remarks, "They have not taught them how to wrestle the bear."<sup>225</sup> The modern church has not wrestled the bear of consumerism, cultural immersion, and discipleship. The modern day bears have attacked our brood rearing process.

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<sup>225</sup> Joe Hagan, conversation with author, Whitehouse, TX , September 22, 2010.

Following a bear attack on a bee yard, numerous hives have been systematically dismantled and torn up. As you can imagine, a beekeeper walking in to a bee yard following a bear attack might experience more than agitated bees. Bees are confused and are hanging on fence posts, the sides of other hives, and all around the bee yard and beyond. When I tell you it's a real mess, I mean it's chaotic. It's like the bees can smell the bear long after the bear is gone. When a beekeeper walks in guess who gets confused for the bear? The beekeeper!

It takes several hours to fix a bee yard and salvage boxes and frames and collect the bees and dump them back in to boxes. The problems we face with the enculturation of Christianity, gimmicky programs and events, and an overall amnesia of the process of disciple making are the bears we will have to wrestle with. It will take time to put our bee houses back in order.

Like a colony of bees the church is called to forage. To make disciples like Jesus did, the church needs to forage. We communicate that life-giving mission with the dance of discipleship. In fact, we learn how to follow and obey. It's hard for bees to dance when bears are knocking over their hives and destroying their future nursery potential. If the nursery of a hive is eaten up by the bear the mission is lost. After a bear attack bees are agitated and flying around confused. Our current church resembles the overtly agitated and aimless colony. Our bees aren't dancing to discipleship; they are trying to survive the bears. It's hard to be proactive with our mission when we are reacting to cultural bears.

The colony of the church can't survive without being engaged in our mission to make disciples. The mission takes us incarnationally into the world to pollinate persons' hearts with the love of Jesus Christ. The posture of living life is advancement. The dance

of discipleship is incarnational ministry. This movement takes us on the dance floor of life to plant our lives with others. The problem is the church has forgotten how to disciple persons into mature followers of Jesus. It has forgotten how to be incarnational. The honeybee can reteach us how to forage again.

Honeybees were created for advancement and perpetuation of their specie. It is hardwired within them. If the bees don't advance outside their colony, the hive will collapse on itself. If honeybees fail to collect protein-filled pollen, they can't raise young bees to maturity. Pollen is high in protein and needed. What deeply rich pollen are we offering young followers of Jesus that will help them eventually mature into foragers? The mission of a beehive takes them in to the field. It is vital they go in order to support the brood nest. The colony will not survive if it is not incarnational. Nor will it survive if it doesn't attend to the nursery.

Jesus' ministry was incarnational. God advanced into human history. The gospel of John records how God is going to carry out his ministry—burrowed in to the human condition (Jn 1). Jesus spent his life not in an office in the temple or local synagogue. He spent his time and ministry out with the public with unusual characters. In training his disciples to maturity, Jesus sent them into the mission field to pollinate. Luke records Jesus' incarnational ministry approach in chapters nine and ten. How were the disciples going to learn how to make followers? Out in the mission field, infusing their lives with others. Jesus intentionally sent them into the context of wolves, with no provision other than trusting his word. They were to “carry no purse, no bag, no sandals (Lk 10:4).” He also told them to stay where they were welcomed and not to move from house to house. Jesus' methodology appears to be highly relational and concentrated on just a few.

No species can survive unless there is advancement and pollination. It is vital to the perpetuation of all living things. Any church wanting to take its people deeper won't do so without an incarnational presence in the world where their lives are melded with others in a highly relational way. The mission field desperately needs to be loved or rather, pollinated. Theoretical pondering alone won't transform the society or church. Praxis is the great teacher. Jesus knew that in both creation and his public ministry.

In preparation for this book, I established a missional/incarnational ministry with my church's youth group. The goal was to start the process of making deeply committed followers of Jesus Christ by engaging the students in a vital mission to their community. A program was designed that focused on serving others rather than just showing up for food, fellowship, games and a lesson. We constantly took them to serve their community. What we discovered is we were making maturing followers of Jesus. The end result was a stronger sense of community, deeper commitment to be incarnational and a growing program. We were taking the youth and their families deeper and the fruit was visible. While discipleship is a lifelong endeavor to maturity, we were seeing evidence of maturity and fruit. The church was starting to dance to the music of discipleship and it started with the youth department. Of course, there were challenges to changing the cultural story of the church. We often experienced pushback from persons and families when we asked for a deeper commitment.

The renewed emphasis on discipleship focused on a missional and incarnational posture started changing the church. Families in the church started seeing their children engaged in the community and dancing the dance of discipleship. We started seeing more bees foraging and pollinating the community.

When the music begins to play, dancing won't be far behind. Discipleship is both music and dancing. In the honeybee world, the music is the sights and smells when those first flowers begin emitting sweet smells and growing in the field. The good news is there are always flowers blooming in our mission field. We can see and smell the lives God is working on. The church is called to move beyond its walls of complacency to the flowering meadow of flowers which need to be pollinated. The interesting thing about flowers is they can't produce unless they are pollinated.

The maturity of the church is dependent upon its engagement with the community in mission. We call this pollination in the bee world. The flowers need pollinating and the bees need the pollen. Neither can survive without the other. And that's the beauty of God's creation. All are dependent on the sacred other, including us. We pollinate the communities we live in with the love of God, but those communities are also the nourishing pollen we need to become faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

### Pollinating our Context

Historian and author Leonard Sweet once said that Christians were called to pollinate the world with the love of God. He didn't realize the impact of his statement and the connection he helped forge.

Honeybees are an invaluable asset to the cycle of life by their pollinating efforts. Not only do bees produce delicious honey and medicinal benefits to the human race but they also are responsible for our diet and the overall wellbeing of life on God's earth. I'm sure bees are not aware that their pollinating contribution is vital to life. I'm pretty sure they don't know they are pollinating when they leave their colony in pursuit of food for their hive. They have no inclination that every time they land on a flower and collect its

resources and then subsequently land on another flower, they are pollinating. While we are aware of their unawareness, we become aware of God's meaningful ways. Just to think...God's ecology of the planet, system of governance, hinges on an insect.

No doubt God created the seed, heat, light, moisture, and the process of photosynthesis. He also created the insect which would be responsible to manage the process. Essentially what a honeybee does to a flower, in pursuit of food, is fertilize it. The numerous small hairs on the bee in addition to pollen baskets on the bee's legs pick up the protein-filled pollen. When a bee lands on another flower the pollen from another flower is brought to the new flower and the female organ on the flower is pollinated or fertilized.

What bees have in mind when they leave the colony to become foragers is collecting enough pollen and nectar to feed a growing brood nest and store enough food to make it through the winter. The colony can't be sustained without foragers. Baby bees grow up and become fully mature adults by eating the protein-rich pollen foragers collect.

In the previous chapter it was stated that the church has not attended the nursery of the church. The process of discipleship (nursery) matures young and growing bees. It does so with pollen collected from bees that were once in the nursery. If there is a breakdown in the nursery it spells disaster and eventual collapse of the colony. Likewise, if there is a sudden loss of foragers the colony will starve to death. A colony needs to attend to both nursery work and foraging in order to pollinate the world. Translated to the church, attending to the process of discipleship through a healthy nursery and mission orientation will make deeply committed followers of Jesus.



The influence of the church on the community of flowers will be minimized if the nursery is unattended and this will affect our foraging efforts. We were meant to pollinate the world with the love of God and this is the food our young and growing disciples need. If the church is not going to engage in some type of meaningful discipleship, then eventually Church Collapse Disorder (CCD) is forthcoming.

The church can return to the fields to which we are called. Great numbers of flowers in the world remain unpollinated without foragers. Remember, foragers are made through a nursery which pushes and pulls them to maturity. That's what a good and accountable community is supposed to do. In order to return to the fields God is calling us to and pollinate His world with the love of God we need to reconsider how we organize and understand ministry. Where do we start to recover?

Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim, in their book, *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church* recommend a new framework for ministry called APEST. Taken from Ephesians 4:1-16, APEST stands for Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepard and Teacher. While every piece of the APEST puzzle is necessary, the office of the evangelist is the catalyst. Gifted evangelists help recruit, network, and build community. Initially, the church needs gifted evangelists to draw people into the community of faith. Hirsch and Catchim write, "From what we can gather from observation and Scripture, evangelists are always looking to create a positive encounter between people and the core message of the church, especially the gospel. Generally they spread the message and enlist others to the cause."<sup>226</sup> The authors highlight the key role of the evangelist as "exceptional recruiters, social connectors and

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<sup>226</sup> Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21st Century Church*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 37.

sharers of good news.’’<sup>227</sup> While the gifted evangelist is central in fostering recruitment, building community, and sharing the good news, they don’t bear the burden of ministry alone. They are the front lines of transitioning a church. The AP and ST of APEST are also needed to help a church culture change to disciple making. While acknowledging the importance of each giftedness, the evangelist’s gift is central to turning a church around.

Piggybacking on Hirsch and Catchim’s work is Neil Cole. In his book, *Primal Fire*, Cole writes that “every now and then, a special surprise turns up in the lost and found box. In the church, that something special is the gifted evangelist.’’<sup>228</sup> Jesus was the great disciple maker and the most gifted evangelist. Jesus was able to draw people in and help them make divine connections. He did so in community and context. Where do we start to recover in reclaiming our mission to make disciples? We solicit the help of the evangelists God has already provided and will provide. Some of them may not even be in the church yet.

Food for the church or a colony of honeybees is found in the field. Jesus modeled this in his constant movement from place to place. The gospels record Jesus’ movement from village to village. Jesus lived quite literally in the context He was ministering. He taught his disciples, modeled Kingdom truths to them, and kept them in the mission field. Jesus was on the go. He modeled how to pollinate the community and context to his followers. Jesus’ young disciples grew to maturity through this high-protein diet.

The model of Jesus, then, is advancement. He demonstrated and lived incarnationally. This is the memory he left his disciples. They all record Jesus’ movement

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Neil Cole, *Primal Fire: Reigniting the Church with The Five Gifts of Jesus*, (Bonita Springs, FL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014), 177.

and his incarnational tendency. Jesus is about advancement, is deeply relational, mentors and models honeybee behavior, in that, he advanced into his world. Why does the God-Man model honeybee behavior? It's simple. He made them and every aspect of their lives is a reflection of his.

A type of ministry which seeks to only engage participants intellectually and not incarnationally or missionally is doomed. All theory and no praxis doesn't lead to transformation. No doubt Jesus challenged the disciples intellectually but did so in their context. Advancement into the foraging fields of life to pollinate the flowers is indicative of God's method of operation (MO). God's way is advancement and this way provides nutritional food to mature young and old bees alike.

Many models of ministry are convoluted with endless cultural norms and practices. Those norms and practices didn't rise out of obscurity overnight. Generations of enculturation have had their impact on the pollinating or advancing nature of the church. One influence which has been incredibly debilitating for the church has been consumerism.

## CHAPTER 5

### CHEW YOUR WAY THROUGH

Choosing to trust Jesus Christ and follow Him is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. The decision to follow is one influenced by God's grace at work within each of us. It is grace which leads us to salvation and a life of pursuing relationship with the Lord. The decision to trust and obey will lead us to breaching a barrier. When one aligns himself or herself to Christ there will no doubt be some adjustments. Numerous barriers, like fear, loss, and education, must be breached on the journey to maturity.

The nursery is the epicenter of every species God created. Life breaks through necessary and maturing boundaries and emerges from the hexagon and blesses us. God created the nursery to mature the young. It is the place of struggle. As a child I remember the first time I witnessed a chick being born in an incubator. It was amazing to see this little beak break the shell (boundary) of the egg. A big piece would break off and there would be a momentary pause while the chick rested from the struggle to free itself from its enclosure. The process repeated until the newborn was finally free from its casing. The chick sat for a while, got its bearings, and then huddled with the rest of the group. I remember reaching in to help the struggling chick and someone quickly told me not to. They explained the chick needed to endure the exhaustion that comes from struggling. It would make the baby bird stronger to endure the process of being born.

Every creature needs to struggle and break through barriers if freedom and life are to be obtained. There are no exceptions and the struggle continues throughout life. Humorously, humans attempt to secure a future without struggle—seeking with religious

enthusiasm and justification more comfort, security, and shelter from struggles. Making life easier for our children does them a real disservice, but that's another book.

On the other side of the barriers is life. The original disciples had numerous barriers to go thru in order to mature. They would not mature unless they chewed their way through the barrier, metaphorically speaking. Jesus constantly taught his disciples lessons He knew they needed. Such lessons would push and pull them to real life. One such example is Jesus' seminar out on the water. You recall the time Jesus came walking on the water and the disciples thought he was a ghost. When they realized it was Jesus, Peter wanted to come out to him. Jesus invited him to join Him. Everything was going according to plan until a barrier fell in front of Peter. Peter became distracted by the wind and the waves and began to sink. Peter called on the Lord and Jesus reached down to pick him up. They then climbed into the boat together. It was a teachable moment for the disciples and for us.

Notice that Jesus didn't come walking on the land and wait for the ship to port. He purposely sent the disciples ahead of him. Neither did Jesus offer a seminar on the boat about how to tread water. He purposely waited to come to the disciples in what I believe was a test. Peter took the bait. The incident offers a profound and teachable moment. The lesson has to do with being distracted and the consequence of distraction. It also has to do with what it means to trust. It was a lesson learned not in a classroom but out on the water. In truth, Peter learned the lesson of trust in both his walk and his sinking failure. Peter didn't become the saint we know because he always got it right. He failed a lot and that was the key to maturity. Jesus calls us to chew our way through...and that's the secret to maturity. Zan Holmes, retired homiletics professor from Perkins School of

Theology, once said, “Jesus believed in leading his disciples in to the discovery of truth for themselves, for Jesus knows there’s not much that could happen through you until it first happens to you.”<sup>229</sup> Jesus believed in discipling his followers to the faith that would set them free (Jn. 8).

Kristopher Norris observes another important revelation about the missing missional component of the church. He writes, “I believe that for too long Protestant churches have focused on correct doctrine at the expense of right practice—orthodoxy over orthopraxy—to the detriment of Jesus’s social calling in the gospel.”<sup>230</sup> While most church leaders would agree on the emphasis on orthodoxy over praxis there are other legitimate reasons why the church camped out on right belief. It is easier. Incarnational ministry is costly. Engagement with our context is costly and something will always be sacrificed when you and I incarnate like the Lord.

The honeybee begins as a tiny white egg at the bottom of a hexagon-shaped cell. It takes her twenty-one days to emerge from her hexagon. In order for her to emerge she has to chew her way through a capping. Other bees don’t help her with this. In fact, it would be an enormous waste of energy to help all these emerging bees from their cells. God engineered them to breach the barrier on their own. This is the key to the future strength of the bee. Like any other species in nature, they must achieve life through barriers. Strength, endurance, and fortitude are acquired when we chew our way through the countless barriers of life. Whether the animal world or the human world makes no difference to God. God’s process for maturing is the same across the board.

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<sup>229</sup> Zan Holmes, “The Lesson of the Loaves,” (sermon, First United Methodist Church, Houston, May 29, 2002).

<sup>230</sup> Norris, *Pilgrim Practices*, Kindle Location 784.

We will call the emerging baby bee a new convert to the faith. She has chewed her way to life and has joined the countless thousands of brothers and sisters. She is not fully mature yet. Actually, when baby bees are born they look like they have been dusted with baby powder and their wings are not fully developed. Translation, they are not able to take flight when they are born. They are purposely underdeveloped so they can't leave the colony. In the honeybee world, newborn bees stay in the colony for a few weeks. They are nursery workers. If the newborn bee's wings were fully developed at birth they more than likely would leave the colony in search of food. This would leave an unattended nursery. Who would feed baby larvae, clean cells, feed queen, and receive food from foragers? God intentionally underdeveloped the baby bees so they would stay in the nursery and care for the queen and her prodigy. A colony can't survive without a nursery!

Neither can a church survive without a nursery. Our baby converts can't survive unless they are involved in the nursery. Many of the Christians in our local congregations have a powdery look about them. Their wings are underdeveloped. They haven't been pushed and pulled through our colony. Some are still in the hexagon cells and haven't chewed their way through. The church hasn't facilitated a process of maturing baby Christians into fully developed foragers for God. They have not attended to a push and pull process. Collapse is inevitable unless there is a process to take our baby bees from infancy to maturity.

At one point in time each of us has been a baby in the faith. Can you recall the people around you who disciplined you? They taught you the faith and how to listen to the Spirit. They helped you understand Scripture and who God really is. They taught you

the disciplines that would help you flourish as a Christian. They taught you how to be self-feeders.

A beehive functions the same way. Baby bees (converts) are born, and as described previously are pushed and pulled. They are pushed by the converts being born behind them and are pulled by the foragers ahead of them. This push and pull is essential to the survival of the hive. It is a process of maturing the residents of the colony. In this push and pull journey the bees are developing and growing. They start at the center of the colony. This is where the nursery is. As their three-week nursery life continues they are constantly being pulled to the entrance. They are moving closer and closer to their mission field.

It is important to understand this because God is about process whether in the honeybee world or human world. Every life form must breach barriers in order to reach maturity. In a beehive bees have to chew their way to life and continue to be pushed and pulled. We call this accountability and mentorship in the church. Young Christians are not ready for the mission field. They require life-on-life relationships which can mentor them to maturity. A large portion of our growth, however, will come through engagement with the mission field. It is believed that the Apostle Paul spent nearly two years in Antioch following his conversion. In that time he was mentored by faithful and mature followers of Jesus. Likewise, for a period of time Jesus mentored his disciples and made a significant investment in them. He pushed them into the mission field and eventually they would be pulled to full time residents of the mission field.

The book of Acts records the maturity of the disciples and their ability to hear/sense the Spirit. They were our first semioticians, I suspect. They didn't begin as



mighty apostles for Jesus Christ but were fashioned by a master beekeeper. He chiseled away at His disciples and eventually they became fruitful promoters and disciple makers themselves. Of course, they weren't done growing and failing.

Does your church have a process of push and pull? Is there a system of accountability, whereby young disciples of Jesus can become fully mature followers of Jesus? Do you have mature Christians in your church who can disciple the baby bees? I know the questions above lack a flare or flash. In a church world where gimmicks are revered and large numeric gains rule the day, these questions may seem irrelevant. I would maintain, however that there is nothing irrelevant about Jesus commission to make disciples. I'm afraid attractional, gimmick based programs, large numeric increases aren't a fulfillment of the Great Commission. Think smaller scale. Think intentional push and pull. Disciples are forged in accountable community and mentor-based relationships. Disciples are grounded by chewing through and living out their faith in context. If young disciples are to acquire life they must breach barriers like: nonacceptance of others for their faith, persecution, disease, death, fear, influence of addiction, disobedience, comparing self to others, education, burnout, etc. Once barriers are breached, disciples can taste the fruit of what it means to live a full life with God. All our lives find us chewing through the obstacles that life throws at us. Those who decide not to chew their way through end up dying to the life God calls them.

If a bee can manage to chew her way through and breach the barrier, abundant life awaits her. This will not be the last wall she has to surmount. Greater barriers will be waiting for her in the fields beyond her walls. Her life thus far has prepared her to take flight. After being born and nurtured in a highly socialized world she will spread her

wings and take an orientation flight. Before leaving the colony for fields of nectar and pollen she must grow up. I know I left you hanging. You were probably wondering what matures this baby honeybee? What takes her from underdeveloped to fully developed forager? What will help her little wings develop? The answer to those questions lies in the field!

While the nursery is being taken care of by maturing baby bees, adult and fully mature bees are in the field collecting resources for the colony. The babies can't grow up without the work of foragers and foragers won't survive without nursery workers. This holy process benefits both baby and adult bee. Neither can live or flourish without the other. Baby disciples and mature adult disciples live by the same mutual and holy benefit. Growth for either of them would be impossible without the other. The bee's governing system relies exclusively on the other. Foragers provide a necessary food for the baby bees that will advance them to maturity. Without it a colony can't mature its young.

What is the first thing the spring of the year produces? You guessed it, pollen. Pollen is the food that takes underdeveloped bees and makes them champions of the colony. What does every maturing organism need in order to survive and bear fruit? If you answered, "the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit," you would be right. However, that's not the answer I had in mind. The answer to the question is protein. Life can't exist without it. Pollen is protein. Foragers move from flower to flower collecting protein for the nursery. Baby bees need protein to bring them to maturity. Beekeepers can feed syrup to their hearts' content, but if there is no protein coming in to the hive, the colony can't raise its young. Who would have guessed that pollen would be that crucial to honeybees?

The process of maturing young converts to fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ is important. The pollen we are feeding them should be equally nourishing to soul and mind. Many in the contemporary church suggest we haven't been feeding our young the deep resources of our faith. Rather, we have been feeding carbohydrates. The diets of many Christians, old and young, have been lacking the protein to help them mature. The decline and collapse of the church testifies to our methodology and diet. Growing disciples need vast amounts of protein and that protein is found in the fields of faith and at the feet of mature foragers.

As I see it, the modern church lacks the process of maturing our bees and is deficient in content (nourishing pollen). In a pollen-less environment maturity is stifled. Young Christians have no process for maturity and few persons mature enough to lead them. The gimmicks, programs, events are not a part of the process and don't offer enriching protein to sustain faith. Many Christians are biblically illiterate and have never done life with mentors. That's unfortunate. The older and more mature bees of our colony should be discipling the emerging bees and helping them to grow through life's challenges. Sadly, supposedly mature Christians have, themselves, been exclusively fed carbohydrates, leaving them incapable of discipling others.

Reflecting on my own process of maturing faith, I recall the friends and mentors God provided for my development and the high concentration of protein I received at their feet. Several years ago I returned to higher education to fulfill a call to write and earn a doctorate of ministry degree. My studies led me to George Fox Evangelical Seminary. I joined the Semiotic and Future Studies Program and was placed in a cohort with fifteen others. This would be my learning group for the next three years. This cohort

with a lead mentor provided the sustaining nourishment I desperately needed in my ministry. It was the pollen I needed to take flight in a new direction. I learned a lot about the faith. The greatest revelations were how stuck I was in my journey and how little I really knew about discipleship. It was in this cohort God planted the idea of connecting discipleship with beekeeping. The connection was forged through countless hours of babbling on to my wife and hours thinking about how God matures life. I realized there really isn't any difference between the system God uses in creation to bring maturity and reproduction and the system Jesus used to forge his disciples to maturity and multiplication. Multiplication is possible and probable with maturity. The accountable community we find in honeybees we also find in Jesus. The push and pull we find in a colony of honeybees we find in Jesus. Graduation to the mission field from the nursery is also a component of Jesus' ministry. What Jesus taught was pollen-rich and a vital part of his methodology for maturing his followers. Pollen has come to represent both the high protein relationships that nourish our walk with Jesus Christ and the deep content of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Pollen is the protein the body of Christ desperately needs in order to make disciples. Pollen for the hive of the church can only be found by maturing bees living incarnationally and missionally in the fields around the hive.

How's your pollen intake? Are you and your church family being nourished by the deep pollen relationships of incarnational living? The fields are ready for a visit from God's pollinators. A sign of maturity of your faith community is their missional and incarnational presence in the context they are supposed to be ministering. Missional and incarnational living are two important sides of the hexagon of life. Another important side of the hexagon is what follows.

## The True Nature

The true nature of a colony of honeybees is sacrificial. It is their credo or their mantra. Everything is done for the sake of the whole in a hive. The mission of the colony is to perpetuate their species. Each bee's entire life is completely given to the betterment of the whole. A worker honeybee will actually work herself to death. Her wings will literally fall off.

On a recent Sunday evening I was resting in my recliner. It had been a long day and I sent my brain on a holiday in front of the TV. On temporary sabbatical, I turned the TV station to one of my favorites—the Outdoor Channel. My favorite personality on this network is Jim Shockey and his show, *Uncharted*. On one particular episode Jim was hunting for bears in a lush, dense forest. He and his camera man and a couple other hunters were following the river looking for bears. While walking up the small river they started seeing salmon spawning. They also noticed dead salmon on the banks where the bears had been eating. Standing by the river, Jim made two statements worthy of inclusion here. “Death begets life” and “Nothing is wasted.”

The salmon come up into fresh water and lay their eggs. They exist not only to breed and lay the next generation but to feed the other animals in the ecosystem. The salmon run is a death run. The death of the salmon is the source of life to many other species up and down the river, including humans. No part of the salmon is wasted. Everything gets eaten and absorbed. The salmon is the staple for that environment and its death begets life for others.

The honeybee, like the salmon, is a staple for our life on God's creation. Both species sacrifice their lives for future generations. Their mantra is “death begets life.”

Their entire life is sacrificial. When you and I observe creation hopefully we can see the connections God supplies and how every living thing God made is connected and purposeful. Creation tells of a God who made a system to mature the young. Life in this system is cherished and only occurs when death precedes it. "Death does beget life."

We have no greater example of this than in the life of Jesus Christ. The gospels record the God-Man sacrificially giving himself to death that all humanity may find life. Nothing about what Jesus did was wasteful. If the church is to find life, it will also have to recover the theology of death. We will have to recover the doctrine of dying to self. Dying to self is a painful barrier to breach but a necessary one if we are to truly live.

Any attempt to make followers of Jesus without dying to self-interest, won't produce disciples. Modeling sacrificial love is the way of Jesus. It is the way God made his planet. For in it is a reminder that we are not the center of the universe. Creation whispers sacrificial discipleship.

Every time you see a bee foraging on a flower or stealing the sweet juice out of a trash can remember the sacrifice that bee is making for the sake of her hive. Remember also she has had to chew her way to abundant life. The bee you and I see has given her life for the sake of her family's mission. Our church family mission is to make followers of Jesus. The only way to do that is to both model living and dying to self. I know it's a painful barrier, but necessary if your ministry is to produce "milk and honey (Ex. 3:8)."

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