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Christian Leadership in an Age of Identity Politics

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EPIGRAPH

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:5-8)

"For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us….. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near…" (Ephesians 2:14,17)

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an attempt to understand New Zealand Christian leadership in a time of divisive identity politics. Using epistemological mapping, the first part of the research begins by considering the effect postmodernism had on the self-understanding of both western society and the wider church. It then considers the impact of neo-economics on traditional political divisions and the shift towards empowering minority social groups. As these changes unfolded, the New Zealand church experienced a dramatic decline, creating significant challenges for its leadership. Through interviews and reflection on leadership writing over the last fifty years, the research maps the change in leadership epistemology such that it has altered ethics, values and theology to justify pragmatism as a primary mechanism for successful ministry. Notwithstanding a quiet call for proper reflection on the nature of leadership in uncertain times, the power of ever-changing secular business models still holds sway in 2020. In most cases, the church has become yet another identity political group concerned with its shrinking place in society. Consequently, part two of the research maps an alternative epistemology of leadership able to engage with a diverse and divisive world without shrinking from it or being defined by it. By connecting René Girard's theory of mimetic desire with Michael Gorman's Cruciform theosis and *kenosis*, a map to understanding why people follow leaders can be more helpfully understood as imitation, while at the same time, challenging leaders to question whom they are imitating and to what end? As Jesus imitates the Father to become like the Father, Christian leaders imitate Jesus' imitation. Thus, the Apostle Paul could say, "imitate me." The goal? To rediscover our likeness to God.

PART ONE: LEADERSHIP PROBLEMS

CHAPTER 1: POSTMODERN COLLISIONS

Three years ago, I edited an essay by a young Christian woman about on-campus bullying of people with alternative sexuality in New Zealand. In her essay, she claimed that her relationships had become complex due to the many different political interest groups represented on campus and how the expression of alternative viewpoints could damage, if not end, those relationships. She went on to write that not only was school unsafe to talk about her fledgling views on contemporary social topics, but also her church and home were no longer safe places to discuss the issues as she knew they would be out of step with her peers who were equally significant in her experience of life. At its core the question was, 'where is a safe place to explore life and faith without relational coercion?' As a Christian she wanted two things. First, that Jesus makes sense in her diverse context, and second, that her pastors (church leaders) would be more open to listening, understanding and dialoguing with her struggles in an open-ended way. Despite spending less time at church and more time serving in the local community, her sense of being Christian remained fundamental, but she did not feel comfortable with her Christian identity in a world of differing voices. It became clear that the phrase *open-ended* was paramount. Because her diverse relationships were both critical and fragile, a partisan Christian apologetic was not the answer to either her Christian identity or her confidence in that identity. Put succinctly, she was asking, 'who is she as a Christian?' and how does the 'who' relate to those who are 'other'; recognising that she is 'other' to them?

The field research component of this thesis showed the same questions arising across different generations. Likewise, church leaders, pastors and priests attend to those

pastoral identity questions depending on their generational gearing. Baby Boomers (those born before 1964) tend toward a modernist approach by providing simple, rational, binary answers to social, ethical and theological questions. Generation X takes a more pragmatic approach when holding diverse communities together with a 'whatever works' approach often based on principals gained from business leadership models that found favour in the 1990s. This pragmatism was not supposed to emphasise a leaders self-interest, nor merely to work for the greater good, but rather to transcend the human instinct for self-interest, ultimately doing that which achieves both the good of self and society.[1] Recent generations, however, hold a greater awareness of complex social identities and cultural nuances such that their leadership may be compromised when their own inherited views are at odds with the individual expressions of others. And this is perhaps the root issue for contemporary Christian leadership. Any clear sense of a biblical, historical or even cultural Christian identity, in the face of conflicting identities, appears to become the victim of populist viewpoints at any given time. So the leader, rather than shaping a community in changing times, ends up being challenged by the people. As Jennifer Berger writes, "Leadership by its very definition is about taking people and ideas to new places."[2] Too often it is the other way around. Unfortunately, for the young essayist above, the responses from family and church leadership were mostly a defensive retreat into the binary rationalism of the 20th century represented by systematic theologies and Christian certitude in uncertain moments.

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[1] Mike Thomas and Caroline Rowland, "Leadership, Pragmatism and Grace: A Review," *Journal of Business Ethics* 123, no. 1 (2014): 99-111, JSTOR, 101.

[2] Jennifer Garvey Berger and Keith Johnston, *Simple Habits for Complex Times: Powerful Practices for Leaders*, Kindle ed. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 7.

However, human beings are too complex, psychologically, physically, spiritually, culturally and politically for simplified defensive responses. There are no binary descriptions that can adequately describe the sophistication of the human person, individually or corporately, which is, of course, the very reason we attempt to do so. Nassim Taleb accounts for the desire to explain the unpredictable as the inherent need for control over situations that we cannot account for, or the human failing he refers to as, "our blindness in respect to randomness." [3] However, randomness is not only connected to significant global events; randomness can also apply to human thinking, communication and relationships. A simple shift in thinking can alter the relational trajectory of known generational and cultural groups, while at the same time uncovering new group identities that, until recently, were never considered as legitimate lenses through which to view the world. In the 1970s it would have been untenable to envisage a time when an enlightened democracy that had been the backbone of technological development, social stability and politics, would be neatly sliced into smaller and smaller identity groups. On the contrary, lower, middle and upper classes segregated by simple economics and the lean political landscape of centre-Left and Right politics, have been supplanted by globalisation, sexual identity acronyms such as LGBTQIA, environmentalism and more extreme Left and Right-Wing ideologies. The idea that internet juggernauts like Apple, Google, Facebook and Amazon could hold control over international markets and social communications with little regulation was the domain

[3] Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, Kindle 2nd ed. (N.p.:Penguin, 2010), xxii.

conspiratorial fiction writers like Aldus Huxley and George Orwell.[4] In the 21st century, what was once considered a big world became very small and at the same time, rather frightening. We are now more connected than ever, but rather than being freer we are more fearful of each other. But why?

Perhaps, the most significant social change in the last fifty years is the way people think about human perceptions of truth. By the 1980s, postmodern thinking transitioned from the realm of philosophy to the public square. In doing so it popularised the deconstruction of grand narratives, often associated with religion, that held power to prescribe how people and communities view their world.[5] Stephen Hicks articulates this postmodern reconfiguration as a seismic shift in our perceptions.

> Postmodernism is anti-realist, holding that it is impossible to speak meaningfully about an independently existing reality. Postmodernism substitutes instead a social-linguistic, constructionist account of reality….. Postmodern accounts of human nature are consistently collectivist, holding that individuals' identities are constructed largely by the social-linguistic groups that they are a part of, those groups varying radically across the dimensions of sex, race, ethnicity, and wealth.[6]

Consequently, modernist social constructions, based on more binary and empirical observations of the world, had their social, economic and religious foundations shaken; previously held visions of humanity become socio-cultural constructs. This notion that all aspects of life and human experience are pre-determined interpretations

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[4] Scott Galloway, *The Four: The Hidden DNA of Amazon, Apple, Facebook and Google*, Kindle ed. (London: Penguin, 2017), 168f.

[5] Ferdinand Potgieter and Johannes Van der Walt, "Postmodern Relativism and the Challenge to Overcome the 'Value-Vacuum'," *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 1, no. 1 (2015): 235-254. Research Gate, 239.

[6] Stephen R. C. Hicks, *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism From Rousseau to Foucault*, Kindle ed. (London: Ockham's Razor Publishing, 2011), chapter 1.

changed not only the way the academy engaged with research, but also how the general populace would reshape its social thinking and interpersonal connections.

The postmodern transformation of western society has opened the doors to a larger world of ideas relating to human meaning and social exploration than at any time since the enlightenment unfurled it's wings across human understanding. Today, the writings of ancient poetic prophets have breathed life into an era of questions surrounding our personal identities and place in this world. The name, Rumi, is often recognised by people even if they know little about him. His 13th century Islamic writings crossed the cultural boundaries of his time from Iran to Turkey.[7] However, his sentiments on humanity and sexuality have found new life some seven hundred years later. Rumi's poetry and wisdom urged a unification of senses, experiences and knowledge in complex times so his writings have seen a resurgence in popular culture, albeit through disconnected quotations.

> "Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
> there is a field. I'll meet you there.
> When the soul lies down in that grass,
> the world is too full to talk about.
> Ideas, language, even the phrase "each other"
> doesn't make any sense. (Rumi "The Great Wagon") [8]

As the world becomes more complex through technological and cross cultural communication alongside ever reducing identity generators, Rumi's wisdom seems comforting. However, it is also a way of burying ones head in the sand to avoid attending to globalisations collision of ideas and cultures. Indeed the resurgence of mysticism

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[7] James Delaney, "Rumi : The Homoerotic Sufi Saint," *CrossCurrents* 69, no. 4 (2019): 365-383, Wiley Online Library, 366-367.

[8] Elyane Youssef. "The Rumi Poem We Should All Read." Elephant Journal. Last modified 21 December, 2016. https://www.elephantjournal.com/2016/12/the-rumi-poem-we-should-all-read/.

within Christianity has, in part, been a very personal way of individualising Christian life and experience while avoiding the concrete world of ethical conundrums, tribal misalignment and religious diversity. Consequently, the question of sustainable cross-contextual Christianity is raised; not so much the institution, but rather what it means to be visibly Christian in the world and what engaged Christian leadership might look like in forming that visible identity.

Yet this is not just a Christian concern. In June 2012, the United Nations set the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at its conference in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Though the seventeen sustainable development goals were both inspired and inspiring, the question of leadership that would bridge the gap between "a plan of action and unprecedented progress" was seen as critical to any transformation.[9] As a result, Seana Lowe Steffen received funding to research leadership models to achieve such unprecedented progress.[10] Essentially, she concluded there was a global call for a recalibration of how we see each other in our interconnected environment which would require a new form of leadership to transcend tribalism.[11]

> What the planet needs is a new kind of leadership that depolarizes and helps human beings realize that none of us, when identified as one family, is 'other' or 'enemy'…. This leadership will be "morally enlightened" in that those in positions of authority will be able to "leave their flags at the door" and act on behalf of the whole human family, not their respective national communities.[12]

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[9] Seana Lowe Steffen and others, eds., *Evolving Leadership for Collective Wellbeing : Lessons for Implementing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals*, (Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2019), 4.

[10] Ibid, xv.

[11] Ibid, 186.

[12] Steffen, *Evolving Leadership for Collective Wellbeing : Lessons for Implementing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal,* 195.

However, the notion proposed is somewhat idealistic, if not naïve. Leadership is not an abstraction apart from the people it leads, as if their culture, morality, dreams, hopes and aspirations are subservient to an undeclared utopian grand narrative. This is certainly true of religious communities and authoritarian nationalities for whom identity and meaning is formed theologically and ideologically upon sacred texts and political philosophy. Moreover, Steffen's conclusions are typically top-down policy statements that, in an attempt to help the world, often make it worse. Often referred to as *Iatrogenics*, it is the act of naively intervening to solve a problem, and in doing so create secondary unintended consequences which are worse than the original condition.

Though Steffen's book contains significant assistance toward leadership outcomes, it is premised on notions that people can be reprogrammed to new ideas with the right kind of leadership. However, this is not what we are currently witnessing across democracies. Since the United Nations set its ambitious targets in 2012, politically the world has lurched further towards nationalism than at any time since World War II.[13] To some extent the blame is not simply economic, but rather a concern among many that social freedoms are evaporating with the rise of identity political movements and their association with Left-Wing politics. The response has been a clear partisan lurch to more extreme Right-wing thinking on a global scale, and unfortunately, it appears to have captured the mind of evangelical Christianity in the process.[14]

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[13] Daniel Hummel, "Revivalist Nationalism Since World War 2: From "Wake Up, America!" to "Make America Great Again"," *Religions* 7, no. 11 (2016): 1-19, https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/7/11/128, 7ff.

[14] L. James Guth, "Are White Evangelicals Populists? The View From the 2016 American National Election Study," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 17, no. 3 (2019): 20-35. Taylor Francis Online.

Despite his somewhat polemical approach toward the experts on this subject, Nassim Taleb is helpful in understanding why the Christian church has been captured by identity political positions in these changing times. In his book, Antifragile, Taleb notes the human need for certainty and control in the midst of unpredicted complexity.[15] And this is certainly true for Baby Boomers and Generation X who make up much of the Christian Churches senior leadership. When faced with a rapidly changing social context in which historic religious status is unravelling, and Judeo-Christian moral norms are diluted. Rather than ask how to live happily in a world we don't fully understand, the response is to opt for a form of civic evangelicalism that protects a familiar cultural story. In America it is a story based in moral nationalism,[16] while in New Zealand, it is a narrative grounded in British colonial heritage.[17] Rather than adapting to the changing circumstance, the general response is to control it – not for the benefit of others, but often for the leaders own survival; professionally, spiritually and psychologically. Taleb writes:

> Because of this fear and thirst for order, some human systems, by disrupting the invisible or not so visible logic of things, tend to be exposed to harm from Black Swans [unpredictable events] and almost never get any benefit.[18]

The end result is that church leaders cling to past Christianised cultural moorings, unable to find a sense of themselves as both interdependent with, and distinct from, their social and political surroundings. Consequently, the aforementioned young woman feeling

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[15] Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *Antifragile : How to Live in a World We Don't Understand*, Kindle ed. (London: Allen Lane, 2012), 6.

[16] Jack Delehanty and others, "Christian America? Secularized Evangelical Discourse and the Boundaries of National Belonging," *Social Forces* 97, no. 3 (2019): 1283-1306, Oxford Academic, 1287.

[17] Allan K. Davidson, "Colonial Christianity: The Contribution of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to the Anglican Church in New Zealand 1840–80," *Journal of Religious History* 16, no. 2 (1990): 173-184.

[18] Taleb, *Antifragile : How to Live in a World We Don't Understand*, 6.

dislocated from any community in which to communicate in an open-ended way is once again silenced; if the leaders of the church cannot differentiate themselves without fear of either their church community or the secular environment (Friedman's non-anxious presence), how can they assist that same differentiation in others?[19] This differentiation requires a sense of personal integration and self-identity that is able to move among a larger colony of other identities.[20] In becoming so, such leaders are able to form others to the same end.

[19] Edwin H Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, ed. Margaret M Treadwell and Edward W Beal, 10th Anniversary Kindle ed. (New York: Church Publishing, 2017), chapter 8.

[20] Ibid, chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2:

HOW DID WE GET HERE? ISMS, IDENTITY, ECONOMICS & DIGNITY

...ISM'S PAVING THE WAY

Post Modernism isn't a 'thing' per se, it's merely a description of a movement away from something else, in this case, Modernism.[1] This philosophic shift to an alignment with postmodern thinking has transformed the current dominant mindset in most humanities departments in American, European and Antipodean universities. To the extent that professors in science and engineering have heard of postmodernism, it leaves them somewhat perplexed.[2] They often observe their co-workers in humanities departments producing erudite papers jam-packed with impenetrable prose, offering outrageous claims (such as that there is no correct interpretation of any text), and offering peculiar courses (such as the history of comic books). In 1968, Doris Wilkinson at the University of Kentucky, complained of Sociologies "imperialistic expansion" through "existentialism and sociometry" into fields of research where it has no place; it pedals ideology as a replacement for empirical study.[3]

Stephen Hicks, professor of philosophy at Rockford College, has produced a clearly written and succinct book describing just what postmodern philosophy is and how

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[1] Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay, *Cynical Theories*, Kindle ed. (Rugby, England: Swift Press, 2020), 11.

[2] Anderson R.J. and W.W. Sharrock, *Postmodernism, Technology and Science* (N.p.: Anderson & Sharock, 2013), 9-10.

[3] Doris Wilkinson, "Sociological Imperialism: A Brief Comment on the Field," *Sociological Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (1968): 397-405, JSTOR.

it came to be.[4] Hicks begins by drawing in broad terms what modernism is: the worldview fashioned by the Enlightenment over the last four centuries. Modernism involves naturalism in metaphysics, mixed with the certainty that contemporary scientific endeavour is capable of providing a reliable understanding of the physical universe.[5] Hicks calls this objectivism in epistemology; the view that experience and reason are capable of acquiring 'real' knowledge. Modernism comprises individualism in ethics and a commitment to human rights, religious toleration, and democracy in political theory.[6] It likewise involves the approval of free-market economics and the technological revolution that it has produced.[7] In sum, modernism is the common mindset of the West, and the end result of Enlightenment theorists such as Francis Bacon, John Locke, Rene Descartes, Adam Smith, Thomas Hobbes, Baruch Spinoza, Galileo, Newton, and David Hume.[8]

Over the last eighty years a group of thinkers have set themselves in opposition to the whole Enlightenment project, rejecting the Enlightenments roots and branches. Dominant among the postmodern thinkers are Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean-Francois Lyotard and Richard Rorty.[9] These theorists have developed a large following in the humanities — especially literature and in the social sciences, but almost no following in science, math, computer science, and engineering. This is not surprising as

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[4] Hicks, *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism From Rousseau to Foucault*

[5] Ibid, chapter 1.

[6] Ibid, chapter 1.

[7] Ibid, chapter 1.

[8] Ibid, chapter 1.

[9] Robert E Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith : Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World*, 7th print. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 22-24.

the postmodern view is both metaphysically anti-realist and anti-naturalist, holding that the physical universe is not describable in any final terms.[10] Furthermore, it is socially subjectivist in epistemology, claiming that the 'world' is what we socially construct it to be, and each 'group' (racial, gender, linguistic, ethnic, national, and so on) constructs the world according to its group identity.[11] Postmodernists are egalitarian and collectivist in all matters ethical and political.[12]

Consequently, postmodernism has had a powerful impact on a number of areas of academic study. In literary theory it has rejected the idea that literary texts have objective meanings open to better or worse interpretation. Rather, the text is merely a vehicle for the critic to exercise wordplays, or deconstruct and expose the racial, class or gender biases of the author.[13] In law, postmodernists known as Critical Legal Theorists reject the idea of universally binding legal principles and objective legal reasoning, rather they view legal reasoning as subjective control for one's own race, class, gender, or political preferences.[14] In education theory, postmodernism discards the notion that teaching should advance a child's reasoning abilities and impart factual knowledge to enable her to function as a productive member of our free-market democracy. Instead, the postmodernist believes education should mould a student's racial, class, and gender

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[10] J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 145.

[11] Amy Chua, "Tribal World : Group Identity is All," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 4 (2018): 25-33, EBSCOhost, 82.

[12] Hicks, *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism From Rousseau to Foucault*, chapter 1.

[13] Ibid, appendix essay, *Why Art Became Ugly*.

[14] Ibid, chapter 1.

identity.[15] In short, society is made up of competing socially constructed world-views and there is no way to determine which of them is true. Truth statements are acts of power over others and ought not be trusted. Consequently, there is no world-view for everyone - there are no meta-narratives, only local ones.[16]

However, as J. P. Moreland points out, it's not all problematic. Postmodernism is correct to warn about the dangers of language used to gain power over others. It is equally correct to recommend the significance of localized narrative and story as the formation of meaning, alongside the warning of the historical excess of scientism and reductionism that grew out of modernist ideas and it's destructive effect on global communities in the name of progress.[17]

Nonetheless, if postmodernism is a theoretical response to a modernist worldview, then it follows that postmodernism must succumb to the same forward momentum of human critique, and there are conscious attempts to ascertain what the next 'ism' might be. Interestingly, the replacements are all 'takes' on modernism as both progenitor and maxim against which all alternative social theories rebel. In 1995 the urban planner Tom Turner wrote of 'post-postmodernism' looking to see urban development tempering "reason with faith" rather than irony.[18] Somewhat depressingly in 2006, Alan Kirby's paper, *The Death of Postmodernism and Beyond,* referenced what he called 'pseudo-modernism' as the coming trivialization of life and events – a "silent autism" replacing

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[15] Hicks, *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism From Rousseau to Foucault*, chapter 1.

[16] Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* 149

[17] Ibid, 152.

[18] Derek Lyddon, "City as Landscape: A Post-Post Modern View of Design and Planning (Review)," *Cities* 14, no. 3 (1997): 183, Science Direct.

the "the neurosis of modernism and the narcissism of postmodernism" – the social endgame of media-stimulated shallowness and internet click and collect intelligence.[19] Finally, the more recent and somewhat promising, 'meta-modernism' (meta relates to Plato's metaxy: the movement between and beyond two poles), was introduced Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker in 2010.[20] Though in its infancy, metamodern theory has created serious discussion as it proposes a conceivable oscillation between and beyond modernisms enthusiasm and postmodernist irony.[21] Hence, they write of, "informed Naivety," "pragmatic idealism" and "moderate fanaticism." [22] The weariness that surrounds postmodern attacks on reality juxtaposed with its clear and correct warnings about power and the use of language for power, means meta-modernism has found a deserved following for future thinking about reality, experience, human meaning-making and political life. However, these theories are yet to gain traction in the academy and have no direct effect on current social and political thinking.

Consequently, though identity politics is the consequential outcome of the modern vs postmodern debate, and metamodern theory is still in its infancy, it can be said with some certainty that the…isms of social, political and economic theory continue to pave the way for what is yet to come.

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[19] Alan Kirby. "The Death of Postmodernism and Beyond." Philosophy Now. Last modified 2006, https://philosophynow.org/issues/58/The_Death_of_Postmodernism_And_Beyond.

[20] Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, "Notes on Metamodernism," *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* 2, no. 1 (2010): 56-77, Taylor and Francis Online, 61.

[21] Ibid, 56.

[22] Ibid, 60.

Identity Politics – a child of conflict

Identity politics has been an emerging phrase in recent years, particularly in academic and political arenas. However, despite having been in use since the 1960's the phrase remains less well known among the general population, but it's effects are more apparent. Despite print and social media having made the phrase, 'identity politics' somewhat more common, it's actual meaning and implications are less understood. Suzzanna Walters describes it as follows.

> Contemporary identity politics—in its most robust manifestations—offers up a critique of what constitutes "mainstream," what "issues" get attached to what bodies, and the hierarchies that result from that attachment. So while identity politics may have resonance going back to older histories of interest groups and constituencies, when we invoke identity politics in the contemporary world, we are really talking about women, queers, religious minorities, and racial minorities. At the same time, we are referencing issues that are seen as having particular resonance or importance for those groups: reproductive rights, police violence, trans access and rights, and so forth.[23]

Perhaps the simplest way of understanding identity politics at work is to envisage a table as a metaphor for some kind of perceived national identity. In New Zealand that table is the Cabinet where elected representatives of the controlling politcal parties sit. To make change at a national level requires either a seat at that table, or the ear of a person already there. Hence the notion of representative politics. However, since the turn of the new century there has been a growing unease among different cultural and social groups that their specific group needs are not being adequately recognised, voiced nor

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[23] Suzanna Danuta Walters, "In Defense of Identity Politics," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 43, no. 2 (2018): 473-488. University of Chicago Press Journals, 477.

legislatively protected.[24] As a consequence there has been a growing desire to chop the table-of-power in to smaller tables. Initially it was along cultural lines for indigenous Māori rights in connection with the Treaty of Waitangi,[25] but divided rapidly to include, people of colour, lesbians, gay men, transgender and other gender identities: essentially, any group identifiable as 'other' from the mainstream of political interests.[26] In effect identity politics transitioned from indigenous and cultural rights and safety, to all groups with a collective social identity. The one large table of power is now divided across smaller and smaller groups. What was once a national board room with a single table representing a somewhat monochrome perspective on national identity, now looks like a Parisian café. Yet this metaphor is not only applicable to national politics, it is also the current experience of business, education and church life. Recently, *Christianity Today* published an article about 'Purple Churches' expressing the leadership conundrum of the never-before-seen identity politicisation of faith, such that personal salvation is evaluated according to identity political orientation.[27]

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[24] Francis Fukuyama, *Identity: Contemporary Identity Politics and the Struggle for Recognition: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*, Kindle ed. (London: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), 6.

[25] "The Treaty of Waitangi is New Zealand's founding document. It takes its name from the place in the Bay of Islands where it was first signed, on 6 February 1840. This day is now a public holiday in New Zealand. The Treaty is an agreement, in Māori and English, that was made between the British Crown and about 540 Māori rangatira (chiefs)." "The Treaty in Brief." Last modified 17 May, 2017, https://nzhistory.govt.nz/politics/treaty/the-treaty-in-brief.

[26] "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual. Though these are only descriptors, they can be broken down into smaller subsets again. Likewise, there are ongoing additions to the sexuality framework." Vanderbilt University. 2018. "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer & Intersex Life." Last modified 2018, https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lgbtqi/resources/definitions.

[27] Daniel Silliman. "At Purple Churches, Pastors Struggle With Polarized Congregations." Christianity Today, Last modified 20 October 2020, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/november/purple-church-political-polarization-unity-identity-christ.html.

For the most part, identity politics is a limited catch-phrase for the extremes of Left and Right-wing politics as they accuse each other of socially divisive ideologies. Likewise, it has made a dramatic appearance in universities around the world, mostly as a mechanism for arguing about restrictions on freedom of speech, or the use of compelled speech to reduce or eradicate perceived injustice. Regina Rini, Chair of Philosophy of Moral and Social Cognition at York University in Toronto, claims that such limitations and compulsions are necessary acts of justice against microaggression towards individuals and marginalised groups. Reporting such events to university administrators is the positive formation of a culture in which no-one is deprived of full recognition.[28] However, not everyone agrees. Jonathan Haidt points out that such action may also be a form of justice-morality that "binds and blinds." As people embrace a moral project they bind themselves to a group of activists, which then "blinds" them to evidence that is contradictory to their position because their relational connections take precedence over rationality; a key feature of Haidt's thesis.[29] Essentially, identity politics shifts the emphasis from safeguarding individuals within society to protecting a collective identity.

For modern political and economic scientists like Francis Fukuyama, politics and personal identity are practically indivisible. For Fukuyama, this inseparability comes about precisely because political categories should be naturally produced. For example, a

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See also, Vanessa Cook. "The Democratic Party is Not Antithetical to Religion." Religion & Politics. Last modified 3 March 2020, https://religionandpolitics.org/2020/03/03/the-democratic-party-is-not-antithetical-to-religion/.

[28] Regina Rini, "How to Take Offense: Responding to Microaggression," *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 4, no. 3 (2018): 332-351, CambridgeCore, 333-336.

[29] Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided By Politics and Religion*, Kindle ed. (London: Penguin, 2013), 221-222.

person may choose to become a Christian or join a political ideological group. However, that same person cannot choose to be a native American, black Christian or a New Zealand Māori.[30] A person is, by nature, gay, Nigerian, British, Malaysian Muslim, or member of the educated middle-class. For Fukuyama, it is only those who are, through 'nature' and not 'choice', members of a group that can claim the undeniable rights of equal opportunities, treatment and unhindered contribution within democratic governance. However, modern sociologists, beginning with Max Weber, disagree.[31] Fukuyama's position is a very basic model of cultural/ethnic construction, but also is convenient as he only acknowledges an objective formation of culture and ethnicity. Stephen May, claims this kind of thinking ignores the more formative yet subjective aspects of ethnicity and group identity. Belonging is not simply natural. Belonging requires a 'learned' language, tradition, and shared story in which multiples of different people may participate.[32] So, it is this political tension between objective and subjective identity formation that underpins and confuses the conflict between historic capitalist economics (the right) and the more recent identity political reinterpretation of economic socialism (the Left).[33]

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[30] Francis Fukuyama, *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*, Reprint ed. (London: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), 109F.

[31] Max Weber, "Economy and Society," ed. G. Roth and C. Wittich, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 398.

[32] Stephen May, *Language and Minority Rights : Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Politics of Language* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 28.

This is a common theoretical claim within linguistics. "The Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, also known as the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis, refers to the proposal that the particular language one speaks influences the way one thinks about reality." John A. Lucy, "Sapir–Whorf Hypothesis," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences,* (2015).

[33] May, *Language and Minority Rights : Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Politics of Language*, 55-57.

To understand the sudden public rise of identity politics, a look at a recent international events is required.

Two Global Reckonings

2017 was a significant year. It was the year that identity politics finally rose to the surface of public attention as identity disputes emerged from decades of discussion in the more boutique domain of internal-Leftist ideology. Subsequently, a somewhat forced dichotomy between national economics and identity politics emerged within political discussions and media interviews. The catalyst for this sudden insensitivity was the dual shock of the British referendum to leave the European Union and the election of the Republican Party's nominee, Donald Trump. After those two events, it became apparent that politics, education, religion, and media entered a new era of internal and external combat over the cause of current social and economic realities. The primary commentary attributes the current state of affairs to the rise of the far-Right, which found it's a voice in the overwhelming domination of 21st century 'political correctness.'[34] The implication being that socially forced language sidelined and undermined the white working class men in order to appeal to people of colour, women and allegedly marginalised groups. Notwithstanding the obvious middle-class interests behind Great Britain's conflicting campaigns to 'leave 'or 'stay', or the irony that upper-class Americans were more inclined to vote for Trump that those on lower-income, both political outcomes are

[34] Meysam Alizadeh and others, "Psychology and Morality of Political Extremists: Evidence From Twitter Language Analysis of Alt-Right and Antifa," *EPJ Data Sci.* 8, no. 17 (2019), SpringerOpen.

classified as a retaliation from 'white working-class men'.[35] However, as Ashok Kumar points out, though political activists defined this group by class and race, it was not robbed by capitalism. Rather, it has been sidelined by multiracial urban elites concerned with, "superficial tolerance and inclusion regarding minority identities in all their forms." [36] And so the deep conflict began. Republican former Chief Strategist (and White Nationalist) Steve Bannon, summarised the perceived situation:

> The Democrats – the longer they talk about identity politics, I got 'em.… I want them to talk about racism every day. If the Left is focused on race and identity, and we go with economic nationalism, we can crush the Democrats.[37]

This political mantra is a part of the political game that played out before the eyes of the general public on both sides of the Atlantic and indeed across the pacific to the Antipodes.

Though the politics of economic ideology have been at war with each other for centuries, the specific division between capitalism and socialism have been more pronounced in the last century and a half. Throughout the industrial era, the conflict between the two has centred on 'ownership' and economic 'distribution' across populations.[38] The task of each ideology was to gain a sense of corporate solidarity in resistance to the other. However, as Trump's presidency and Brexit conflicts have shown,

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[35] Sky Gould and Harrington. "7 Charts Show Who Propelled Trump to Victory." Business Insider. Last modified 11 November 2016, https://www.businessinsider.com.au/exit-polls-who-voted-for-trump-clinton-2016-11?r=US&IR=T#/#more-women-voted-for-clinton-as-expected-but-trump-still-got-42-of-female-votes-1.

[36] Ashok Kumar and others, "An Introduction to the Special Issue on Identity Politics," *Historical Materialism* 26, no. 2 (2018): 3-20. Accessed 11 J. https://brill.com/view/journals/hima/26/2/article-p3_1.xml?language=en, 4.

[37] Timothy Egan. "What if Steve Bannon is Right?" New York Times. Last modified 25 August 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/25/opinion/bannon-trump-polls-republican.html.

[38] Francis Fukuyama, "Identity Politics New Tribalism and the Crisis of Democracy," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 5 (2018): 90-112, EBSCOhost, 92f.

our debates now embody larger and more complex problems. No longer is it about the shared benefits of economic growth and its distribution to a population, it is now about distribution to particular people groups within societies. Consequently, with economic distribution, comes the requirement for representation at the highest political levels.[39] Once that idea is articulated, fear rises among the prevailing political brokers; for when power and wealth are shared among an increasing number of identity groups, power and wealth equally diminish.

Accordingly, we can see how identity political wars come into being. The Right, as represented by Bannon, claims the root of economic dispossession has nothing to do with the structure of capital. Rather, it is the Left's cavalier spending on those who do not merit it: specifically, people of colour, alternative sexualities and other economically insignificant communities. As Kumar claims, "The implicit logic here is that the greater the dispossession of the racial and gendered Other, the higher the pile of scraps under the table of the capitalist class."[40] And it is here the critical problem unfolds: there is a clear difference between the politics of class and the politics of identity. The Right of politics argues for economic nationalism benefitting the majority (class Politics) and has significant partisan support. Meanwhile, the Left has created a structural philosophy of individualised identity politics that seriously complicates the prospect of wide-ranging collaboration.[41]

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[39] Ibid, 93.

[40] Ashok Kumar and others, "An Introduction to the Special Issue on Identity Politics," *Historical Materialism* 26, no. 2 (2018): 3-20, https://brill.com/view/journals/hima/26/2/article-p3_1.xml?language=en, 5.

[41] Fukuyama, *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* 105ff.

Economic Distribution

In the 1970s there were 35 democratically elected governments. By the year 2000 that number increased to 110.[42] In that same fifty years output of goods and services increased by approximately 500%.[43] That growth reached across the earth. Likewise, as economic and geopolitical changes took place, the number of people and communities living in depravation plummeted. In 1992 42% were living in abject poverty, yet by 2008 the number dropped to 18%.[44] However, as thrilling as those statistics look, the profit from those economic shifts was not distributed evenly. Despite the poverty rate reducing, numerous countries, particularly developing democracies, experienced increased economic inequality because the benefits of economic development flooded into the pockets of the already powerful. With the increasing movement of people and resources from one country to another, other unsettling changes became apparent.[45] In developing nations, village inhabitants with no experience of modern life found themselves living in urban communities and surfing the web on smartphones.

As the predictions of futurists came to pass in the rising of the middle-class in China and India,[46] manufacturing progressively relocated from Europe and the United

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[42] Drew DeSilver. "Despite Global Concerns About Democracy, More Than Half of Countries Are Democratic." Pew Research Center. Last modified May 14, 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/14/more-than-half-of-countries-are-democratic/.

[43] Yascha Mounk and Roberto Stefan Foa, "The End of the Democratic Century : Autocracy's Global Ascendance," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 3 (2018): 29-36, Gale in Context.

[44] Kaushik Basu. "The World Has Made Great Progress in Eradicating Extreme Poverty." The Economist. Last modified 31 March 2017, https://www.economist.com/international/2017/03/30/the-world-has-made-great-progress-in-eradicating-extreme-poverty.

[45] Melissa S. Kearney. "How Should Governments Address Inequality? : Putting Piketty Into Practice." Foreign Affairs. Last modified November 2017, Gale in Context.

[46] Alvin. Toffler, *The Third Wave* (London: Collins, 1980).

States to East Asia due to significantly lower labour costs. Simultaneously, women were also replacing men in the labour market, which was also progressively being controlled by service industries where smart machines were replacing low-skilled workers.

These unsettling cultural transformations of traditional practices diminished the rush toward a new progressive world, in fact, it reversed. In 2007-8 the death knell came suddenly through the global financial crisis and the attendant European financial crash several months later in 2009.[47] As a consequence, policies fashioned by financial elites created a gigantic global recession with unemployment skyrocketing across progressive countries that were supposed to be safe. Consequently, these financial and workplace calamities marred the moral character of the system as a whole.[48]

The knock-on effect has been politically significant. The last ten years has seen the number of democratically elected governments reduced.[49] Moreover, democracy as an accepted polity retrenched.[50] More worryingly, a number of undemocratic countries, guided by Russia and China, have asserted themselves more fully. Countries such as Hungary and Poland that were once considered to be emerging and effective egalitarian societies in the 1990s, more recently regressed to authoritarianism.[51] More damagingly,

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[47] The Guardian. "Greek Debt Crisis." The Guardian. Last modified 5 May 2010, Accessed 4 December, 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/business/2010/may/05/greece-debt-crisis-timeline.

[48] Jamie E. Scalera and Melissa D Dixon, "Crisis of Confidence: The 2008 Global Financial Crisis and Public Trust in the European Central Bank," *European Politics and Society* 17, no. 3 (2016): 388-400, EBSCOhost. .

[49] DeSilver, "Despite Global Concerns About Democracy, More Than Half of Countries Are Democratic".

[50] John G. Ikenberry. "Democracy in Retreat: The Revolt of the Middle Class and the Worldwide Decline of Representative Government." Foreign Affairs. Last modified September 2013, JSTOR.

[51] Marc Plattner, "Liberal Democracy's Fading Allure," *Journal of Democracy* (2017): 5-14, ProQuest Central.

while the Arab revolts of 2010 and 2011 interrupted dictatorships in the Middle East, they generated no movement toward democratisation: in reality, the result of those rebellions led to despotic regimes holding on to power, leading to the destructive and ineffective civil wars in Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen.[52]

To some extent, all these changes are the result of economic and technological shifts within globalisation. Nevertheless, that explanation is not enough by itself. The changes are embedded in the upsurge of identity politics.[53] Twentieth-century politics was expressed in economic terms to address social issues. For the Left it was a period that focused on the rights of workers upheld through unionism, and economic redistribution in the form of social welfare. On the other hand, the political Right was chiefly intent on limiting the role government in social affairs by endorsing the private sector and economic philanthropy. Not so in 2019. For the Left, the needs of multifaceted identity groups take centre-stage over the creation of a comprehensive economy. The economic and legislative rights of groups are often in conflict with the economic whole. In comparison, the Right tends to define its raison d'être as the defence of traditional nationalised economic identity alongside political tradition, religious tradition and the mechanisms of class structure.

These political changes upend the conventional understanding of political struggle as being nothing more than the outcomes of economic conflict.[54] Nonetheless, as critical

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[52] John Davis, *The Arab Spring and Arab Thaw : Unfinished Revolutions and the Quest for Democracy*, Arab Studies Quarterly (London: Routledge, 2016), 123ff.

[53] Amy Chua, "Tribal World : Group Identity is All," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 4 (2018): 25-33, EBSCOhost.

[54] Robin Varghese, "Marxist World," *Foreign Affairs* 97, (2018): 34-42. Accessed 12 December, 2018, ProQuest Central.

as economic self-interest is, people are motivated by a wider complexity of things; dynamics that more clearly illuminate our present-day experiences and perceptions.

Across continents, politicians on both sides of the political divide rally supporters around common themes attributable to anyone with an injustice to bear. They inform people that they have been undermined and they need to be restored to full partnership within the nation state. Among Authoritarians, these claims are abundant. Vladimir Putin, railed against the European Union and the United States for taking advantage of his country under the leadership of Gorbachev in the 1990s so the Western Allies could expand the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.[55] Chinese President, Xi Jinping, referenced the "century of humiliation" from 1839 [56] through their war with England over the opium trade and later British control of Hong Kong.[57] And their populations listened. Moreover, that same offence over humiliation has developed into a formidable force in liberal democracies. The recent increase of campaigning for black Americans rights originated from a sequence of African Americans being shot by police. Though it may not have made an immediate difference, it caused the global media to raise a red flag on unsanctioned police violence.[58] Similarly, in a resurgence of feminism, global focus on their treatment on college campuses, in hospitals, the military and business offices across

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[55] Glasser, Susan B. "Putin the Great: Russia's Imperial Impostor." *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 5 (2018): 10-16, ProQuest Central.

[56] Pamela Crossley. "Xi's China is Steamrolling Its Own History." Foreign Policy, Last modified 29 January 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/01/29/xis-china-is-steamrolling-its-own-history/.

[57] See Steve Tsang, *A Modern History of Hong Kong*, Kindle ed. (New York: I.B.Tauris, 2004), 29ff.

[58] Gabriel L. Schwartz and Jaquelyn L. Jahn, "Mapping Fatal Police Violence Across U.s. Metropolitan Areas: Overall Rates and Racial/ethnic Inequities, 2013-2017," *PLoS ONE* 15, no. 6 (2020), https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0229686.

the industrialised world, women have rightly been incensed over current and historic sexual harassment, concluding that men rarely saw them as equals. So too, the unrecognised discrimination of transgender people has found visibility among a wider audience.[59]

Our era is awash with people groups who believe that their identities are not gaining satisfactory legislative or economic acknowledgement. Thus, it seems that identity politics is no five-minute phenomenon located in the rarefied precincts of academic research or affording a mock framework for insignificant 'culture war' skirmishes on the internet alone. Today, identity politics is the leading ideology in clarifying current global concerns.

This leaves contemporary liberal democracies confronting a significant challenge. Globalisation has begotten the economic and social change that has resulted in the diversity we now face; it has crafted the burden of recognition now required by groups that were once invisible to conventional society. As a matter of course, these demands have resulted in a counterattack from other groups threatened with a loss of social prominence and feelings of displacement. As stated earlier, what were once nationalised democracies have now splintered into ever diminishing identities, undermining discussion and cooperation. Unless liberal democracies can unpack more universal perspectives on human dignity, they will inherit the only outcome available, ongoing conflict and outrage in a call-out culture that sees 'difference' as the enemy.

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[59] Heather Brunskell-Evans and Michele Moore, eds., *Transgender Children and Young People: Born in Your Own Body*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2018).

Dignity

There is a general assumption by economists that material wealth is the yearning that drives the majority of people. This notion of human behaviour is enmeshed in liberal democracy and remains a premise within current social science.[60] Despite this thinking being somewhat mainstream, it contradicts much of western histories classical philosophical thinking, chiefly, the longing for dignity. Francis Fukuyama makes the important observation that Socrates understood 'dignity' as shaping an essential 'third part' of what it means to be human, that part works alongside and modifies both the 'desiring part' and the 'calculating part'. Fukuyama points to Plato's Republic, where Plato designated this 'dignity' as the *thymos*, which English renders weakly as 'spirit.'[61]

Within the world of politics, Fukuyama's *thymos* can be understood in dualistic tension. Fukuyama calls the first part, *megalothymia:* a craving to be renowned as more powerful than all others. Because pre-democratic societies were built on social hierarchies, the belief that some people were superior to others created the foundation for aristocrats, royal families and nobility – they were fundamental to any kind of social order. There is, however, an obvious drawback with *megalothymia.* For it to have a place in social thinking, it requires that for every superior person, there must be many more people of less worth and without recognition. As a consequence, there arises a powerful emotion of resentment when an individual or individuals feel disrespected. Thus,

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[60] Anthony Elliott, *Contemporary Social Theory: An Introduction*, Kindle, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Routledge, 2014), 258.

[61] Fukuyama, *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*, 15f.

Fukuyama speaks to the dualistic opposite of *megalothymia*, which he calls *isothymia*, an experience that makes people want to be equal to all others.[62]

For Fukuyama, it stands to reason that the growth of democracy is really the drama of *isothymia's* conquest over *megalothymia*.[63] As in the case of the Russian Revolution, civilisations that only acknowledged the rights of cultural elites were ultimately supplanted by social revolutions that recognised all people as fundamentally equal. During the 20th century nations formed on class-structure eventually gave way to the equality of common people, and as a result, those populations that had been colonised chose to seek independence.[64] In all parts of the industrialised world, but most crucially the United Kingdom, the United States, South Africa, Germany and France, the difficult political transition surrounding slavery, workers' rights, and women's equality came into being by demanding government increase its sphere to include those individuals with a representative recognition at the table of power.

However, it needs to be understood that just because equality exists in law, it does not necessarily follow that equality, economic or social, comes to pass. Over the past thirty years, developed countries have presided over dramatic income disparity. Substantial segments of their populations have experienced stagnant incomes alongside increasing costs and, as a result, many have experienced plunging social mobility.[65]

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[62] Ibid, 25f.

[63] Ibid, 116-119.

[64] For a complete and complex list of countries, see Robert K. Schaeffer, "Secession and Separatism," in *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace & Conflict,* (2008).

[65] World Social Report 2020: Inequality in a Rapidly Changing World (United Nations Department of Economic Affairs, 2020). https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2020/01/World-Social-Report-2020-FullReport.pdf, 22ff.

Nationalism vs Personal Rights

The correlation between income and change in social dignity helps to comprehend how nationalist politics and conservative religious pleas succeed more than Left-wing appeals built on identity equality. Nationalists massage those who feel historically alienated with the mantra that they are indeed the last hope of a once-great nation (whatever nation that may be) and the belief that aliens, immigrants, and academics scheme to restrain their historic freedoms. Sentiments like, 'I feel like an alien in my own country,' or baby boomers may say, 'we are no longer appreciated', add fuel to the nationalist fire. Likewise, the religious Right narrates an equally epic narrative: 'You are a members of a large kingdom of disciples, betrayed by nonbelievers. This treachery will result in religious alienation and is an offence to God.'[66] On October 27, 2020, the Washington Post ran an article on the evolving network of Patriot Churches wanting their country back for God and consequently fusing politics and religion in a country that constitutionally separates them.[67]

The predominance of these storylines explains why immigration (in all its forms) has become such a globally contentious issue. Nevertheless, immigration is hardly new, and, like trade, it always boosts the economy of every country. The problem, as noted earlier, is that it does not benefit all sectors of society equally. However, despite the use

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[66] See articles based on comments from Pastor Robert Jeffress a well-known evangelical pastor Carol Kuruvilla. 2019. "Evangelical Pastor: Democrats Have Created an 'Imaginary God'." Last modified 2 July 2019, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/robert-jeffress-imaginary-god-democrats_n_5d1bc171e4b082e553716943.

[67] Sarah. Pulliam Bailey, "Seeking Power in Jesus' Name: Trump Sparks a Rise of Patriot Churches," *Washington Post*, October 27 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2020/10/26/trump-christian-nationalism-patriot-church/.

of immigration to gain political leverage over populations, it does not explain why nationalism has gained the support of those who once leaned Left. It is here that we see most clearly how two forms of identity politics have materialised over the last two decades. One is based in collective nationalism, while the other appeals to personal rights. One is an influential collective; the other is equally powerful, but atomised.

In past eras, liberal progressive reformers expressed the publicly held feeling of exploitation and anger at wealthy capitalists under Karl Marx' rallying cry, "Workers of the world, unite!"[68] As a result, European democracy emerged on a footing of working-class solidarity and the powerful collective of unionism. On a similar platform, but with a different emphasis, ordinary American voters overwhelmingly supported the Democratic Party and its New Deal [69] that came about between 1933-1939, lasting till the Reagan era in the 1980s.[70]

As a consequence, during the new era of globalisation, Left-wing parties changed tactics. Instead of emphasising collective solidarity around the working-class or the economically deprived, they emphasised ever-diminishing marginalised groups in precise and unique ways. Over time, the loosely held belief in the constitutional recognition of all

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[68] Ronald Niezen, *A World Beyond Difference: Cultural Identity in the Age of Globalization* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2008).

[69] The term "New Deal" is a title given to an extraordinary array of policies implemented during Roosevelt's presidency to provide relief, impose reform, and promote recovery from the Great Depression. It created a coalition between political parties, labour unions, workers, minorities and intellectuals. It gave Roosevelt widespread support for the significant government programs enacted under the New Deal. See, William J. Collins, "Editorial Preface "New Views of Roosevelt's New Deal"," *Explorations in Economic History* 50, no. 4 (2013): 463-465, ScienceDirect.

[70] Reagan's pedagogy is significant to understanding how globalisation rose to such prominence. In part because Reagan had cultivated the evolution from statism to the marketplace. In doing so, he left two legacies in the field of international trade. First, the replacement of General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) with a comprehensive rule-making body, the World Trade Organization (WTO) (1995). And second, the move toward integration with neighbours, Canada and Mexico, which ultimately resulted in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) of 1994.

people transformed into demands for unique and specific legislative recognition. This atomisation from nationalist politics to specific social groups proved so successful that, by the 1990s, the phenomenon drifted from the Left to the Right.

From a political stance, it was both reasonable and essential that Left-wing policy incorporated identity politics. International travel, the Internet, global media and immigration have offered a glimpse into the lived experiences of those who would otherwise remain invisible. When cloistered in partisan worlds, general populations fail to understand the specific harm certain actions cause; as many men are now comprehending in the challenge of the #MeToo movement's disclosures concerning sexual assault and harassment.[71] Identity politics in its rawest form aspires to change culture and behaviour by asking society to become more than it has settled to be, and in becoming so, provide visible material, psychological and social equity for all its people.

By sharpening the focus on the experiences of injustice and inequity among smaller populations, identity politics has achieved many welcome changes in traditional patterns of thinking and behaviour alongside appropriate changes in public policy. In the United States the campaign for Black American safety and their growing mistrust of the police has caused law enforcement across the country to be cognisant of how they treat minorities. The #MeToo movement reached a global audience with the help of internet media and celebrity support. It has extended general understanding of sexual assault and opened a conversation regarding inadequacies and injustices of existing criminal law.

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[71] Pardis Mahdavi. "How #metoo Became a Global Movement." Foreign Affairs, Last modified March 6 2018, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2018-03-06/how-metoo-became-global-movement.

Most obviously, it has changed the way men and women interact in the workplace, and despite the often-awkward reframed interactions, the changes are indeed healthy.

Identity politics was always going to be the evolutionary political response to personal injustice in a globalised and technologically connected world. However, the focus on the minutiae of cultural and sexual identity issues has distracted attention away from reversing the thirty-year drift of most liberal democracies to increasing socioeconomic inequality. Added to this is the problem of thoughtful discourse. In its fledgling state, identity politics can provide an existential threat to free speech and therefore to any lucid discussion required to maintain an open and free-thinking democracy.[72] Throughout history democratic societies have fought to maintain the public voicing of alternative viewpoints, especially in political debate. Nonetheless, the concerns of group identity have collided with the prerequisite for civic discussion. The significant attention given to the lived experience of particular identity groups tend to predetermine that the needs of the experiential 'inner-self' outranks the rational necessity of public examination of those issues by the external world.[73] Such a position gives precedent to sincerely held opinions over coherent research. When the assertion of one person is felt to be offensive to another person's identity, it can be grounds for suppressing the thoughts of the one thinking differently.[74] This is especially troubling

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[72] Pluckrose and Lindsay, *Cynical Theories*, 114.

[73] Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided By Politics and Religion*, 221-222.

[74] In 2018 New Zealand's Massey University came under public scrutiny for refusing to allow a Don Brash, a previous leader of the New Zealand National Party, the Right speak on Treaty of Waitangi negotiations because his views differed from the opinion of the university's senior leadership. George Heagney. 2019. "Concern for Massey's Reputation Following Don Brash Saga." Stuff News. Last modified 11 January 2019, Accessed 24 April, 2019. https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/education/109856830/concern-for-masseys-reputation-following-don-brash-saga.

when it affects institutions of learning, or the debating chambers of political representation.

However, these adverse outcomes must be comprehended in light of the ordinary individuals who form identity political groups and the human needs being articulated. If indeed identity politics aims to change global culture for the better by asking societies for the fair equitable treatment of all its members, then is a virtuous evolution of social politics.[75] As Courtney Jung wrote in 2006, "All politics is identity politics."[76] Accordingly, the more threatening aspect of identity politics, as the Left presently applies it, is its adoption by the Right as a tool to leverage fear for political ends and not genuine social progress. Globally, societies are becoming sympathetic to unique group dignity resulting in new, yet unfamiliar, boundary lines. Touching, speaking and even thinking are all under evaluation. Specifically, formerly acceptable ways of speaking have become offensive, so knowing how to speak is a shifting target of social complexity. The simple use of the personal pronouns 'he' or 'she' in specific settings may be experienced as insensitivity toward people of alternative sexuality, thus denoting an absence of compassion for their struggles. Consequently, older generations and more socially conservative religious communities feel alienated and at risk, making them as susceptible to Right-wing political manipulation. Though there are very few artisans and intellectuals who radically champion the most extreme formulas of political correctness, when they are expressed those few occasions are picked up by conservative Christians

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[75] Suzanna Danuta Walters, "In Defense of Identity Politics," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 43, no. 2 (2018): 473-488. University of Chicago Press Journals, 483.

[76] Courtney Jung, "Why Liberals Should Value 'Identity Politics'," *Daedalus* 135, no. 4 (2006): 32-39. 35.

and nationalistic politicians along with the conservative media, who in turn use them to disenfranchise the Left as a whole, creating fear in the general populous.[77]

Because identity politics has expanded across the global and has found a voice in most representative political contexts, it is a movement that is here to stay. The challenge, like all challenges, is to decide what to do with it. Christians leaders can create a new identity politic for themselves and fervently clamour for their own collective rights. Alternatively, they can accept identity politics for what it is in its ideal form - an attempt to make the world a better place. If taken to be just that, rather than fight against it they can work with it. In 1946 George Orwell wrote in his article "Politics and the English Language" that the word "fascism" was simply understood to depict "something not desirable."[78] More recently, Timothy Oliver, Fellow in British and Comparative Politics, wrote, "identity politics has become the new fascism – or indeed the new centrism, neo-liberalism, or populism. It is simply shorthand for any idea that a person, or persons, dislike."[79] However, fascism and identity politics really do exist, and there are people who merit understanding and engaging with because they unmistakably play a role in the everyday politics of ordinary and sincere life. As with all things new, the chaos and mess of early discovery and adaptation may, in time and with care, produce a political gift that keeps giving in the decades to come.

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[77] Walters, "In Defense of Identity Politics.", 478.

[78] George Orwell. "Politics and the English Language." George Orwells Lbrary. Last modified 24 September 2015, http://www.orwell.ru/library/essays/politics/english/e_polit.

[79] Timothy J. Oliver. "Here's a Better Way to Think About Identity Politics." The Conversation. Last modified 26 June 2018, https://theconversation.com/heres-a-better-way-to-think-about-identity-politics-84144.

CHAPTER 3:

IDENTITY POLITICS AND IT'S INFLUENCE ON NEW ZEALAND AND THE CHURCH

The Politics of Church Identity

To understand how identity politics has shaped the self-perception of the New Zealand Christian church, we must comprehend, at least in part, New Zealand's unique view of the world and the history that has formed it.

According to the most comprehensive religious research, undertaken by the Wilberforce Foundation in 2018, 55% of New Zealanders do not identify with any main religion: 20% claim a spiritual belief of some kind, while 35% do not identify with spiritual belief of any kind. Of the entire population, 33% claim a Christian connection (Protestant and Catholic) and 12% identify with other religions. As it stands, approximately 9% of New Zealanders attend a Christian church on any given Sunday;[1] along way short of historian Alison Clarkes observation that 30% attended church worship the 1890s.[2] This latter figure is curious because census figures at the time suggest that 90-95% affiliated with the Christian faith. Given that settlers arrived after the early pioneers in 1840, the question that arises is what formed that Christian affiliation? As New Zealand did not have an enculturated Christianity, the high affiliation rate was

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[1] Mark McCrindle. "Faith and Belief in New Zealand: A National Research Study Exploring Attitudes Towards Religion, Spirituality and Christianity in New Zealand." Last modified, 2018, Wilberforce Foundation, https://faithandbeliefstudynz.org/.

[2] Alison Clark, "Churchgoing in New Zealand, 1874–1926 How 'Mediocre' Was it?," *New Zealand Journal of History* 47, no. 2 (2013): 106-135, http://www.nzjh.auckland.ac.nz/document/?wid=1971&page=1&action=null, 126.

most likely a vestige of religious cultural practice imported during the settler period. However, despite imported cultural faith, a unique New Zealand identity slowly formed, and given the rapid decline of church attendance, that identity was not directly Christian. Additionally, before 1840, most European pioneers had a reciprocal working relationship with Māori. They tended to be whalers, sealers and missionaries, many of whom lived among the Māori population since Captain Cook first landed in 1769. During that time, Māori converted to Christianity through the mission work of the Catholic and Anglican churches who came to New Zealand as part of the early pioneer movement. The mission was so successful that before the mass migration of Europeans from 1840 there were more Māori Christians than European Christians.[3] That would not remain the case, however. The large increase in settler immigration and the land-wars between 1845 and 1872 demolished the trust between Māori and the church, as the latter was understood to be colluding with a land-hungry British Crown and the powerful privatised New Zealand Company who illegally confiscated millions of acres of Māori homeland.[4] Consequently, as the decades passed Māori recollection of European Christian culture was less celebrated and ultimately discarded. Likewise among the settlers the imported European conceptions of Christianity were found ill-fitting to this new nation a long way from

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[3] Despite the land-wars and the mistrust that developed between the European and Māori Christian churches, in 2002 the New Zealand Census figures revealed that 98% of those with Māori ethnicity still classified themselves as Christian. See New Zealand Statistics. “2002 Census Snapshot: Māori.” Last modified April 2002, http://archive.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/people_and_communities/maori/census-snapshot-maori.aspx.

[4] Edward Wakefield who created the New Zealand Company in 1836 as the New Zealand Association, “envisaged the creating of 'Little Englands' all over the world - each having the refinements and the social and economic structure of the Mother Country, but being free from its evils. The New Zealand Company was intended to turn this vision into reality in one particular country - New Zealand.” “The New Zealand Company.” The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. Last modified 2017, https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/topic/1216.

Victorian England and conservative Europe.[5] Consequently, old religious habits died off as the restraints of cultural and constitutional Christianity diminished.

Perhaps less recognised is the intellectual and social knowledge of the time. New Zealand and Australia were the last two countries founded in modern history as a result of British colonial expansion. Unlike the experiences of India and the Middle East, these antipodean invasions became colonies based on enlightenment policies that changed the human trajectory of each countries' social evolution; though in very different ways.[6] Australia, with its vast continental land mass was unhindered in its development by the ancient Aboriginal people group who were systematically violated through assimilation and, on occasion, extermination.[7] New Zealand, on the other hand, is a small, mountainous country with short distances between the coasts and inhabited by a large tribalised Māori population with a long warrior tradition thus colonisation in New Zealand was to come at a tremendous human cost on both sides, resulting in the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi between Māori and the British that shapes the country to this day.[8] Despite Australia's unfettered brutality toward the Aboriginals, treaties were becoming

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[5] Douglas Pratt, "Secular New Zealand and Religious Diversity: From Cultural Evolution to Societal Affirmation," *Social Inclusion* 4, no. 2 (2016): 52-64, 55.

[6] Stanley Hauerwas wrote, "Insofar as Australia can be said to have a public philosopher, that person is Jeremy Bentham rather than John Locke." Stanley Hauerwas, "Reading Yoder Down Under," in *Faith and Freedom: Christian Ethics in a Pluralist Society,* ed. David Neville and Philip Matthews, (Hindmarsh, Australia: ATF Press, 2003), 171.

[7] Colin Tatz, "Genocide in Australia," *Journal of Genocide Research* 1, no. 3 (1999): 315-352, EBSCOhost, 9ff

[8] Dr Paul Spoonley points out that though New Zealand has invested heavily in indigeneity, it has been further behind in addressing multiculturalism, or what he refers to as, "superdiversity". The significant movement of people groups in recent years has found New Zealand unable to address bi-culturalism and superdiversity simultaneously. See, Paul Spoonley, "New Diversity, Old Anxieties in New Zealand: The Complex Identity Politics and Engagement of a Settler Society," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38, no. 4 (2015): 650-661. Taylor and Francis Online, 651.

commonplace in the 19th century. Professor Edward Keene notes that European treaty making increased sevenfold between 1800 and 1900, especially in its relationship with non-European countries.[9] Though it sounds like an altruistic alternative to war, treaties were often little more than a "fiscal-military state." [10] However, international relations, industrialisation and privatisation were all enlightenment realities. This approach to cultural relations, given that it exchanged ongoing violence with a perceived dialogue and commitment to a shared reality, did achieve a level of peace with Māori.[11] However, Keene's "fiscal-military state" was the underlying reality, which saw a broad failure to comply with treaty obligations ending in poverty and the social isolation of Māori in their own land; treaty failure presided over the demise of the Māori church.

As New Zealand attempts to set right the wrongs of the past, a central aspect of that failure is the churches participation in land confiscation and collusion with the fiscal-military state. If child abuse is the nuclear moment for the global Roman Catholic Church, then treaty failure is the New Zealand Christian churches moment of repentance and restitution. In such a small country, the churches culpability cannot be underestimated, nor the power of modern identity political claims against the unlived claims of the Gospel. In fact the only chance the church had of making it into New Zealand was because of these two issues.[12]

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[9] Edward Keene, "The Treaty-Making Revolution of the Nineteenth Century," *The International History Review* 34, no. 3 (2012): 475-500, JSTOR, 476.

[10] Ibid, 477.

[11] Paul Spoonley, "New Diversity, Old Anxieties in New Zealand: The Complex Identity Politics and Engagement of a Settler Society," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38, no. 4 (2015): 650-661. Accessed 1 November, 2019, Taylor and Francis Online, 657.

[12] Douglas Pratt, "Secular New Zealand and Religious Diversity: From Cultural Evolution to Societal Affirmation," *Social Inclusion* 4, no. 2 (2016): 52-64, 53.

Aside from treaties, other aspects of enlightenment thinking created a very different environment for social evolution. From the beginning, there was a vague separation of church and state until the Education Act of 1877 stated that New Zealand was a secular society and primary education would be provided "free and secular and compulsory." [13] Similarly the first elections held in 1853 were unusual in the sense that they were for individual representatives and not political parties. In 1890 the first organised progressive Liberal party was formed and it's opposition, the Conservative Reformed party, arrived eighteen years later in 1908. Politics was a simple division between centre-Left and centre-Right.[14] The result was a country that celebrated its secularism while acknowledging it's Christian heritage, alongside rapidly growing immigrant religious diversity.

Consequently, as a small and somewhat isolated Pacific nation, New Zealand is still trying to understand itself in a global context as an easy-going, adaptable and socially concerned country without being tethered to historic visions of political or religious ideology.[15] Yet, despite seeming like the ideal country to live in, it is also exposed to social division and political manipulation precisely because it is small. With the rise of the internet and social media it is nearly impossible to hide from ethical, social

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[13] M. King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand* (Auckland, New Zealand: Penguin, 2003) 233.

As a side note, Crystal Downing notes that the phrase "separation of church and State" appears nowhere in the American constitution. Rather, having escaped religious persecution they simply forbade a state sponsored church; there would be no religious hegemony. Crystal L. Downing, *Changing Signs of Truth* (Downer Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 161.

[14] New Zealand Parliament. "The History of New Zealand's Party System." Last modified 3 March 2020, https://www.parliament.nz/en/get-involved/features/the-history-of-new-zealands-party-system/.

[15] Pratt, Douglas. "Secular New Zealand and Religious Diversity: From Cultural Evolution to Societal Affirmation," 55f.

and political agendas. Seen by many leaders as ideological hand-grenades, these explosive social and moral transformations are continually creating leadership issues for a church already on the back foot of national decline. To place the power of these divisions in context, New Zealand's entire population is 5 million,[16] while American Southern Baptists number approximately 15 million as one denomination.[17]

Accordingly, identity political issues have been complicated for the Pākehā (all non-Māori) church. Bi-culturalism and Treaty of Waitangi commitments have divided churches attempting to address historic injustices pastorally and spiritually. And though they remain points of contention, a younger generation more familiar with the broader experience of identity politics are working towards community growth and reconciliation. Likewise it is the younger generation who are confronting perhaps the greatest cause of recent identity political schism in the New Zealand churches short history - homosexuality.

Beginning in the mid 1980's with proposed legislation to decriminalise consensual sex between men aged 16 and above (there was no criminal law pertaining to women) and was known as the Homosexual Law Reform Act.[18] At that time, the Coalition of Concerned Citizens, comprised of conservative Christians, circulated a petition among the churches and walked the streets for signatures to have the legislation struck down. They presented the final document to parliament on the 24 September 1985,

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[16] "Population." Stats New Zealand. Last modified 30 June 2020, https://www.stats.govt.nz/topics/population.

[17] Dalia Fahmy. "7 Facts About Southern Baptists." Pew Research Center. Last modified June 7 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/07/7-facts-about-southern-baptists/.

[18] "Homosexual Law Reform in New Zealand." Ministry for Culture and Heritage. Last modified 14 June 2016, https://nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/homosexual-law-reform/homosexual-law-reform.

with over 800,000 signatures. However, due to inconsistencies, the petition was rejected.[19] Yet, from a population of 3.2 million, the petition revealed the level of social conflict within a changing society – change that church leadership failed to comprehend. The legislation passed in 1986. However, the issue was raised again on three further occasions. In 2004 the Civil Unions Bill provided an alternative to marriage, but was essentially a way to acknowledge property rights of same sex couples.[20] As the church attempted to opposed the Act, it became apparent that Christians no longer held a common position on same sex relationships and there was a growing sense the Act was a justice issue and not a moral one. Divisions in churches were palpable in a way not experienced in the 1980's; a division that publicly displayed among progressive and conversative Christian politicians within the parliamentary debating chamber.[21] Then came the inevitable Marriage Amendment Act in 2013 allowing same sex couples to marry.[22] This drove a stake in the ground for many churches as pastors and laity alike had to take a position that would alienate them from their denominations, ministries, friends and in some cases families. Since that time many churches have made internal constitutional statements on the issue such that they are clearly seen to be on one side or the other. In doing so, church goers could determine the political and theological position

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[19] L. Guy, "Evangelicals and the Homosexual Law Reform Debate," *Stimulus: The New Zealand Journal of Christian Thought and Practice* 13, no. 4 (2005): 69-77.

[20] "Civil Union Act 2004." New Zealand Legislation. Last modified 14 August 2018, http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2004/0102/latest/whole.html.

[21] "Civil Union Bill - Second Reading." New Zealand Parliament. Last modified 2 December 2004, https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/hansard-debates/rhr/document/47HansD_20041202_00000704/civil-union-bill-second-reading.

[22] "Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Acts 2013." New Zealand Legislation. Last modified 19 April 2013, http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2013/0020/latest/DLM4505003.html.

of the church and leave, stay or join accordingly.[23] Finally, in 2017 legislation to expunge all convictions for historic homosexual offences was passed through parliament without challenge, thus releasing past, present and future New Zealanders to a life of preference freedom.[24] If the church was out of step with society previously, it was now being perceived as a social pariah, within and without. The simple political and theological problem of same sex relationships become a psycho-theological maze of internal division, socially and pastorally.

The young woman's essay in chapter one represents well the current leadership conundrum. Inasmuch as theology, politics and denominational history are significant areas of concern and interest, the central leadership issues are not merely ecclesiastical, ideological or theological, as they are about public safety. New Zealand has one of the highest rates of youth suicide in the OECD.[25] In 2013 New Zealand was third highest for males and the highest for females.[26] Young people are asked to have opinions on complex issues such as sexuality, politics, the environment, justice alongside their own aspirations, and to do so in a world of conflicting ideas and groups. However, there is

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[23] Denominations differ in their approach to same sex marriages. Most do not allow it, though some offer provisions to acknowledge same sex civil marriages. New Zealand Anglicans differ from diocese to diocese. Some may offer a marriage blessing to couples married in a civil ceremony, but only with the permission of the parish vestry and also the Bishop. Given that Anglicans are among the most socially progressive churches, the restrictions point to significant internal devisions.

[24] "Criminal Records (Expungement of Convictions for Historical Homosexual Offences) Act 2018." New Zealand Legislation. Last modified 7 August 2020, http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2018/0007/latest/DLM7293253.html.

[25] "Annual Provisional Suicide Statistics for Deaths Reported to the Coroner Between 1 July 2007 and 30 June 2020." Mental Health New Zealand. Last modified 12 August 2020, https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/Suicide/2020-Annual-Provisional-Suicide-Statistics.pdf.

[26] "An Overview of Suicide Statistics." Ministry of Health. Last modified April 2017, https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/pages/data-story-overview-suicide-prevention-strategy-april2017newmap.pdf.

little to help address the emotional upheaval of political and social dissent. In 2013 Brian Barber, professor of child and family studies at the university of Tennessee wrote extensively on emotional and developmental wellbeing of adolescence during war, especially in the Middle East. He claimed that despite limited research there are common observations. First, peer or group engagement is essential because war is primarily social and its suffering is interpersonal, thus any attempt to isolate a youths personal welfare apart from the community is artificial at best. Consequently, the well-being of a youth, independent from others, is likely to be determined by the collective outcome of the war they are fighting. However, post war studies show individual depression and PTSD as consistent long term realities.[27] With the boom of online technology, and group identity political struggles, the perceived war is often fought alone but in concert with a social media cohort. Unlike youth in war-torn countries, the enemy may be parents in the same home, the church attended, or other adolescent friends – the war may be more esoteric, but it is psychologically real just the same – the group makes it real.[28] Although adolescents reason well, research shows they often do not have the emotional maturity to cope with disagreement.[29] Given that adult leaders in the church are supposed to exhibit a greater emotional resilience amid dissent, they often fail to do so. As a result younger people do not know who to safely communicate with in order to be heard and supported.

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[27] Brian K. Barber, "Political Conflict and Youth," *Psychologist* 26, no. 5 (2013).

[28] Ibid.

[29] Laurence Steinberg and others, "Are Adolescents Less Mature Than Adults?: Minors' Access to Abortion, the Juvenile Death Penalty, and the Alleged Apa 'Flip-Flop.'," *American Psychologist* 64, no. 7 (2009): 583-594.

Identity Politics for all its benefits in relation to marginalised people, unwittingly marginalises the most vulnerable – those with developing minds. By playing the identity political game of taking sides and driving partisan stakes in the ground, Church leaders may have formed each church community to be yet another identity political group among the many – albeit a declining one.

Personal Christian Identity: Casualty or Perpetrator?

C.S Lewis is quite possibly the most recognised Christian writer of the 20th century. His wartime scrutiny of social and political affairs in an time when Christian orthodoxy was under attack (in ways that Americans are only just beginning to experience) combined with a world renown imagination, enabled him to defend the Christian faith with intellectual erudition in the world of the academy, whilst simultaneously comforting the faith of the general population. Through the world of *Narnia*, the *Screwtape Letters, Surprised by Joy* and the *Problem of Pain,* Lewis spoke to the hearts and faith of a population often struggling with untold ordinary enemies (physical and ideological) pounding at the gates of belief alongside the profound call of divine love.[30] During World War II on the 10th of January, 1941, in an article for *The Guardian Weekly*, Lewis addressed a political identity conflict brewing in regard to the call for a Christian party to protect historic Christian virtues. War always creates a conflict of justification surrounding means and ends and the voices that speak for the decisions made – a Christian Party cannot speak on behalf of God. He wrote:

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[30] Andrew Dean Swafford, *Spiritual Survival in a Modern World: Insights From C. S. Lewis's Screwtape Letters*, Kindle ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), 75.

> The danger of mistaking our merely natural, though perhaps legitimate, enthusiasms for holy zeal, is always great. The demon inherent in every party is at all times ready enough to disguise himself as the Holy Ghost,…[31]

Over the following months Lewis wrote a number of articles for various newspapers on good and evil and rational defences of Christianity under attack from Freudians, Marxists and psychologists of the time.[32] However, on the 2nd May 1941, the first 'Screwtape Letter' appeared in *The Guardian Weekly*, and continued for thirty-one weeks. Each letter contained correspondence between a senior and junior devil imaginatively contending for the minds and souls of ordinary people. Given the social context in which the 'Screwtape Letters' were published, Andrew Swafford writes about their popularity:

> Screwtape's letters range the entire gamut of human life—touching on everything from prayer, relationships, friendships, suffering, anxiety, despair, love, virtue, sarcasm, and so much more. Though he writes as a demon, Screwtape understands things surprisingly well, often grasping God's vantage point far better than the human patient—indeed, far better than we typically do. It's that keen demonic insight that—when untwisted— will be our guiding light.[33]

Just as World War II began as a continental European conflict for land and power, it was also a battle between secular and religious reasoning. Lewis saw this. In the battle for the Christian mind by fledgling socio-political powers, Lewis saw a growing gap in the nature of meaning-making for Christians in the midst of war filled uncertainty. Though New Zealanders are not at war for land and power, we are at war for ideas, rights, materiality, justice, fairness and inclusion in times of increasing uncertainty,

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[31] Lewis C.S. 1941. "Meditation on the Third Commandment." The Guardian Weekly, MIT. Last modified 1997, https://web.mit.edu/bcf/www/BSJ97/cslewis.html.

[32] Joel Heck. "C. S. Lewis & Three Wars: 1941." The Official Website of C. S. Lewis. Last modified June 14 2010, https://www.cslewis.com/c-s-lewis-three-wars-1941-pt-2/

[33] Swafford, *Spiritual Survival in a Modern World: Insights From C. S. Lewis's Screwtape Letters*, xii.

fuelled no less by the 2020 Corona virus. In very real terms our modern context is only a blink-in-time away from the turbulence of World War II. Inasmuch as New Zealander's under the age of seventy five have never been confronted by foreign invasion, they have been affected by the post war social revolution which has presided over of the decline of Christian belief. The problem Lewis saw unfolding, is the cauldron in which younger New Zealand Christians now reside.

Effect on Christian Leaders

During focus group discussions for this dissertation, Ella Young, a Christian youth worker, observed this stress in her ministry with people under eighteen.[34] She said, "the constant clash of worldviews was incredibly hard to navigate because of the emotion teens have invested in LGBTQIA or the environment or social justice or bi-culturalism; sometimes all of them combined." What she noticed, however, was the significance of the relational and emotional investment of the young people into their various identity groups. At their age, their relationships around an idea are more important than any observable personal transformation. For teens and early twenties, belonging is more powerful than belief.[35] "Their identities are relational and issues based more than they are spiritual" said Young. As a result, it appeared that being Christian was a consequence of their connection to a service based Christian activity and its attendant relationships.

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[34] Young, Ella. Interviewed by Digby Wilkinson. Wellington, New Zealand, 20 November, 2018.

[35] This is consistent with James Fowlers *Synthetic Conventional* 3rd stage of faith. The period in which conformity is of greater significance than belief. James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York: HarperCollins, 1981).

In two distinct focus group discussions, each with eight people, a similar conclusion was exposed.[36] The first focus group comprised people aged 18-30 and the second 30-70, and all were professed Christians from different denominational backgrounds, social settings, employment and cultures. As the discussion focussed on how group members gain a sense of meaning, the answer was universally the same; though they enjoyed the church community as a place to meet other believers to worship and pray, other groups and relationships outside the church provided more purpose, and by extension their own personal sense of meaning in the world. Nevertheless, apart from the four who no longer attended church, the rest were not happy about it. They all felt there was a disconnect between their faith-life among other believers, and the ordinary world they inhabited. They wanted their faith in Christ and the Christian community to be the source and support of their meaning and purpose but could not see how. In part it was a question of honesty, few felt they could articulate personal doubts, or converse about volatile social and moral questions without wrecking relationships. Oddly, they felt safer outside the church where such issues were not so relationally confronting; though most recognised their non-church conversations were less intimate. As a result, two side questions came about: is that the fault of church leadership, teaching or personal discipleship? Or, is it the result of fear in a rapidly changing society in which Christians are simply unaccustomed to having their viewpoints publicly challenged? Attacks on the church for paedophilia, homophobia, political corruption and fraud, felt like an attack on

[36] Anonymous Group by agreement. Interviewed by Digby Wilkinson. Wellington, New Zealand, 1 & 5 March, 2019. The groups were a randomly chosen mix of people from different churches – four people in the two groups no longer attended church. All chose to remain anonymous because it was agreed that the conversation would remain totally private given the need for people to speak freely. All comments were recorded, but no names were attached.

them personally. So, do they give way to ‘fight’ or ‘flight’? Neither option seemed like the actions of those following Christ. On the topic of leaving the church, all had considered it at some point. However, their individual faith is resilient and, for most, God has kept them in a church. As a caveat, most of them recognised that their movement between churches over specific pastoral and social issues was based on identity politics and what they were personally prepared to support. This led back to the earlier question, is that the fault of church leadership, teaching or personal discipleship? There was a general feeling that the key leadership of any church was the principal attraction or repellent in their experience of church life although “they would put up with a lot for existing relationships.”

The Complexity of Desire

Christians moving from church to church for relational and theological reasons is nothing new. However, as vocal and socially partisan identity political groups have formed in New Zealand, personal Christian identity has changed accordingly, but not perhaps as much as one might think. Tumultuous church debates have shifted from the theological divisions created since the reformation, to partisan moralising over social issues and the politics of inclusion. To that extent, these different touchstones of conflict reveal the same problem expressed in different ways: Christian group identity has been the vehicle for Christian meaning-making for a very long time, and at the heart of it is a leader, or leaders, who either shape or justify any positions held.

In part two of the dissertation there will be a fuller consideration of the Catholic historian and philosopher, René Girard and his theory of Mimetic Desire. Nonetheless, a brief articulation is warranted here. Essentially Girard observes divisive religious

behaviour as the culmination of his belief that people only "desire only through the desire of others."[37] Essentially individuals and individuals in groups mimic those they esteem or wish to be like, imitating what they admire, what they desire, who they like and what they resent. This must also be true in leadership because leaders are mimics of desire too. As shall be seen in chapter five, mimicked desire ultimately leads to rivalry, competition, division and even violence. However, to avoid violence or aggression, a scapegoat may be chosen to divert the internal tension away from communities and leaders alike; such a scapegoat is often another individual or another group.[38]

So what is different in this era from decades past? Fight or flight are now equally feasible options. Because the New Zealand church has no constitutional connection to the state, and because it is in significant decline, leaving the church does not hold the social losses it once held. If personal meaning-making can be found elsewhere without the need of a church community, then individualised Christian faith, without connection to other Christians, is a commonly chosen option, albeit a faulty one. Jason Clark makes the point well:

> For at its heart is an ontological dissembling, with the separation of being and doing. The idea that I can be a Christian and that what I do has no immediate or long-term impact to who I become. This state of affairs, no matter how much we want to believe otherwise, is not only untrue for Christian identity, but fails to hold true for any other identity-forming aspect of life.[39]

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[37] René Girard, "Violence and Religion: Cause or Effect?," *The Hedgehog Review* 6, no. 1 (2004): 8-20, Gale Academic, 9.

[38] Scott M. Thomas, "Culture, Religion and Violence: René Girard's Mimetic Theory," *Millenium* 43, no. 1 (2014): 308-327. SAGE Premier, 311.

[39] Jason Clark. "Just Go to Church: You Don't Need to Go to Church to be a Christian and Other Fairy Tales." Paper presented at Society of Vineyard Scholars Conference, Minneapolis, MN. 2-4 May, 2019, 4.

Who we do things with determines who we become. Simply exchanging one group for another merely relocates the human need for meaning through affirmation, intimacy, purpose and belonging to another setting where we feel our desires can be met.

Identity politics may not be new in Christian history, but the diversification of identity in a society adrift from its Christian roots has had a profound effect. It has not only reformed the position of the church within society, it has provided two alternative Christian responses. First, one may escape from the church to a new identity of personalised spirituality untethered from church community. Second, walk a more partisan path as combative religious communities at war with the world and each other. It is on these fronts that church leaders face significant challenges.

CHAPTER 4:

LEADERSHIP ADAPTATION OR MUTATION?

From Ministry to Management : Theology to Pragmatism

Though a postmodern worldview was birthed in the mid twentieth century, its public effects in New Zealand were not experienced until the 1980's. As noted in chapter three, in referencing sexual identity rights, the social issues that were once controlled by grand Christian narratives around ethical behaviour and national belief were being challenged. Certainly Christian academics were attending to postmodernism, but it was a subject that most pastors found philosophically difficult.[1] Consequently, they focused principally on the moral challenges posed, alongside the churches declaration of the universal and life defining claims of the Bible. In the 1990s Os Guiness and David F. Wells became a source of hope for evangelicals of all dispositions as they articulated what leaders were actually seeing in their churches, and they presented those pastors with a basic understanding of what was happening – of sorts. In 1994 Guiness wrote,

> There is no truth; only truths. There is no grand reason; only reasons. There is no privileged civilisation (or culture, or belief, norm and style); only a multiplicity of cultures, beliefs, norms and styles. There is no universal justice; only interests and competition among interest groups.[2]

In a similar tone, Wells noticed a growing simplification of the Gospel in isolation from the grand sweep of Christian history, theology and tradition, claiming Evangelicals:

> … have lost interest (or perhaps they can no longer sustain interest) in what the doctrines of creation, common grace, and providence once meant for Christian

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[1] D.A Carson; Gordon Clark; Harry Blamires; Dinesh D'Souza; Alisdair MacIntyre; Robert Wuthnow and Wade Clark Roof were all prolific writers and thinkers for the time.

[2] Os Guiness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1994), 105.

> believers, and even in those doctrines that articulate Christ's death such as justification, redemption, propitiation, and reconciliation. It is simply enough for them simply to know that Christ somehow died for people.[3]

With the benefit of hindsight, inasmuch as Guiness and Wells both observed the effects of postmodernism on leadership and provided an early response, they were actually writing to an already changing church in the throes of responding to postmodern influence without realising it. Mark Noll observed evangelical leadership's response as the result of their context: "the evangelical ethos is activistic, populist, pragmatic and utilitarian. It allows little space for broader or deeper intellectual effort because it is dominated by the urgencies of the moment." [4] Again, Wells captured the impact of that growing evangelical pragmatism.

> As nostrums of the therapeutic age supplant confession, and as preaching is psychologised, the meaning of the Christian faith is privatised. At a single stroke, confession is eviscerated and reflection reduced mainly to thought about one's self.[5]

In 1991 Loren Mead offered thoughtful insights regarding church life in a post-Christendom era; as the continuities of church tradition were abandoned and theologies disassembled, tradition would be replaced by "new technologies and gimmicks" and the "tyranny of the new." [6] And it was precisely into that Western Christian milieu that George Barna

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[3] David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth, or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 128.

[4] Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 12.

[5] David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 101.

[6] Loren Mead, *The Once and Future Church* (New York: The Alban Institute, 1991), 77.

offered, not a practical theology, but rather a practical response to the 'perceived' needs of pastors in a period of great change. His popular book, *Marketing the Church,* provided church leaders with a new vision of the future church – one unencumbered by theological debates the unsaved did not care for. Barna presented faith as a consumer desire, salvation as product to be marketed, and leadership as an accountable task that can be measured.[7] By borrowing heavily from the success of business marketing, Barna reframed the church as a franchise that must show a profit through the efforts of leaders with a gift mix very different from those described by the Apostle Paul.[8] In the confusion of postmodern dominance, leadership, vision, decision making, visibility and pragmatism replaced everything related to counselling, spiritual formational and teaching.[9]

In the mid 1980s, denominations across New Zealand, which had been influenced by the charismatic movement, observed how churches in the United States were growing rapidly while in New Zealand there was now decline.[10] These American congregations were flourishing through programmed evangelism, changing of worship styles, centralised leadership and altering more conservative spirituality paradigms to address their connection with the needs of the local unchurched community. In New Zealand the catalyst for change came primarily from Christian business leaders asking questions

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[7] George Barna, *Marketing the Church: What They Never Taught You About Church Growth* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1988).

[8] Ibid, 26.

[9] George Barna, *User Friendly Churches: What Succesful Churches Have in Common and Why Their Ideas Work* (Ventura, CAL: Regal Books, 1991), 143-146.

[10] Kevin Ward. "The Charismatic Movement and Protestant Churches in New Zealand." Paper presented at Religious History Association of New Zealand conference, November, 2003, https://kevinrward.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/charismatic-movement-in-nz-historical-perspectives.pdf, 10.

about national attendance figures in line with Barna's analytics.[11] This in turn led to cross cultural interaction with a number of American mega-church leaders, some of whom lead congregations of up to 20,000 people.[12] Subsequently, by 1990 a number of these American Pastors were invited to offer 'leadership' conferences within New Zealand.[13] In doing so it began to alter the face of traditional pastoral ministry.

Inasmuch as the Christian church has contextually reinvented itself throughout the centuries, this latest iteration required more than altering language, terminology and music. In church growth ideology, birthed through the writing of Donald McGavran in the 1960's, evangelism became the fulcrum around which all church life would function.[14] Subsequently, because all ministries were motivated by evangelism, or the 'saving of souls', the congregation became therapeutic instrument to meets the ever changing needs of the local community as a way of achieving that end. Through such ministry, needy people become open to the Christian Gospel, join the church, swell the numbers and go on to do the same for others.

In my interviews with current and past church leaders who were in ministry through the 1980s and 1990s, all felt significant pressure to facilitate the paradigm shifts needed to make this kind of transition.[15] Few were educated or experienced enough to

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[11] Ibid.

[12] The years between 1990-2010 two American churches of significance have been Willow Creek community church in Chicago and Saddleback Community church in Orange County California. Both these churches had attendances in excess of 20,000 each week.

[13] Ibid, 8.

[14] D. A. McGavran, "Church Growth Movement," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology,* ed. Walter E. Elwell, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 242.

[15] These face to face interviews took place between Thursday 28th November 2019 and 2nd

organise and mobilise people with diverse denominational backgrounds, and had no idea how to acquire needed resources and communicate a vision and dream of what the church could become and achieve. Apart from the skills required, perhaps most disheartening was the belief they needed to reinvent themselves as marketing experts. From a very early stage in their ministries it became apparent that preaching, prayer and spiritual formation were not the key ingredients to successful contemporary ministry. Rather, a new kind of leadership was emerging with its roots in the business school of Harvard University.

The majority of interviewees saw themselves as spiritual leaders helping people to develop their understanding and experience of God within the Christian covenant. The emerging form of leadership being promoted was not a spiritual concept, but rather a set of unfamiliar management skills: vision casting, goal setting, vision maintenance, project funding, success evaluation and celebration, target identification and leadership character development. Despite being daunting, most of the interviewees initially believed the changes to be a healthy process of clergy development in a changing context. They all found the rigours of declining ministry in a growing pluralist (the postmodern word of the 1990s) society difficult, so the church growth movement with its tidy programmatic structure provided an opportunity to revitalise a congregation's sense of self and give new meaning to the pastor's role. Yet while it gave a new sense of direction in difficult times, the change of emphasis and required skills considerably changed their vocational values. The subtle message was that 'numbers count'. In fact, the primary method of

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December 2019 and consisted of four men and four women and lasted for two hours. They were Baptist, Anglican, New Life and Roman Catholic. Throughout 2020, there were three further interviews with now retired pastors via zoom.

evaluating pastoral leaders ministry in a 'growth' context was and remains the numerical size of a congregation in relation to the local community. Though this was probably not the original intention of McGavran, it is certainly the way the message was absorbed at an individual and corporate level. Subsequently, the requirement to see numerical growth through new converts created pressure to do what 'works' in ministry without considering the ethics involved.[16] Pragmatic programming became a way of surviving in a competitive environment. In most cases this pressure did not come from the congregations, but rather the professional denominational environment. McGavran's successor in Church Growth Movement, Robert Wagner, believed that all churches could grow in any context – the only hurdle was the pastor.[17]

Inasmuch as pastors felt significant external pressure to perform on paper along with an internal spiritual dislocation, sociologically this was not surprising. In 1999, Charles Taylor depicted two 'takes' on modernity which he categorised as 'cultural' and '*a*cultural'.[18] Cultural modernity views the 'difference' between present western society and medieval Europe as analogous to the differences between medieval Europe and say China or India. That is, we can speak of the 'difference' as being between civilisations each with their own culture. In contrast he defines *a*cultural modernism as a view of global history that emphasises the demise of 'traditional' society and the rise of the 'modern'. Thus modernity is seen as a set of transformations that any culture can go

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[16] Marva J. Dawn, *A Royal "waste" of Time: The Splendor of Worshiping God and Being Church for the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 55, 65, 69.

[17] Peter Wagner, C., *Your Church Can Grow: Seven Vital Signs of a Healthy Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 61f & 145f.

[18] Charles Taylor, "Two Theories of Modernity," *Public Culture* 11, no. 1 (1999): 153-174, 1.

through and will probably be forced to go through. This, says Taylor, is the most popular form of modernity and probably the most unhelpful.[19]

Contemporary *a*cultural modernity uses management, strategic planning, big car parks, comfort and user friendliness as its primary tools for social development and has been the framework on which secularisation expanded. And, because secularisation is a movement away from religious ideas and institutions as beneficial for human wellbeing, modernism's social equations, programmes and techniques become the arbiters of human meaning and purpose.[20] Combined with Os Guinness's belief that modernity's authoritarian programming is anti-intellectual (it prefers empirical data over theory), then society, along with the modernised church, is prone to a mindless 'development' pragmatism that never finally succeeds because it is never reflective about its agenda.[21] Thus it can be argued that the Church Growth Movement adopted *a*cultural modernity's tools for social development to reshape the church. In order to achieve this, the leadership and management practices of *a*cultural modernity were incrementally applied. The emphasis on numerical growth through programmatic evangelism, meeting homogenous social needs and the adoption of secular leadership methodology is evidence of this.

With this cultural analysis, there have been numerous voices who have asked questions about the ethics, theology, and implications of the 'growth' emphasis on the

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[19] Taylor argues that acultural modernism is faulty on two fronts. Firstly it fails to comprehend that our understanding of science and religion have been factors in cultural development. Self understanding and social awareness are not simply part of an enlightenment package that rationally explains our place in the universe. Secondly, this kind of modernism has devastating consequences for non-western societies. History has revealed that the imposition of acultural modernism locks the world into an ethnocentric prison. Ibid, 8-9.

[20] Taylor, *Two Theories of Modernity,* 7-8.

[21] Os Guiness, *Dining With the Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts With Modernity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993), 45.

values of pastors.[22] In his book *Working the Angles,* Eugene Peterson made the controversial observation that church pastors have deserted their posts by walking from the ministry ascribed to them by God and becoming something other than what they are 'called' to be. What was most disturbing, he points out, was that none of them had left the pulpit. Rather, they turned the ministry of the church into a supermarket with a glamorous shop front by moulding their ministries to suit the principles of a market economy. They talk of statistics, images, influence and status while the matters of God and the soul are not, as he puts it, 'grist for their mills.'[23] Peterson's book was produced at the midpoint of the above mentioned Church Growth Movement and was based on American and Canadian research. Yet because New Zealand churches have borrowed so heavily from this movement, Peterson's comments, among others, raise contemporary ethical questions that are applicable to our own context; questions that are often shunned by an institution that now too easily adopted pragmatic management principles because they 'apparently' work.

So, did Christian leadership merely adapt to its post-modernising, pluralist context, or did it mutate? To make any conclusion requires an examination of the corporate worlds underbelly of rarely discussed values and the capitalism it is based on.

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[22] Philip Yancey, Eugene Petersen, Henri Nouwen and Robert Wicks are writers within Christianity who have asked such questions over the last forty years.

[23] Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987).

A New Set of Values

To suggest that there are specific moral values that direct all business goals and activities would be incorrect. Every business is unique because each individual creating a business enterprise has unique aspirations and motivations. Some businesses are sensitive to the social implications of their actions to achieving certain goals. In this sense they are sensitized to justice and fairness. Some are cognisant of issues surrounding justice and economic distribution alongside the civil liberties of their employees. Again, others are not. However, even though the motivating values are very diverse, it is equally true that the justifications for those held values are also diverse. Yet in every case the ethics of business practice are based on theories of consequentialism, duty or virtue. In 2020, Max Bazerman noted that most contemporary corporations subscribed to a utilitarian approach in the maximising of value for society. However, the complex technologies and the introduction of artificial intelligence mean teleological ethics often present more problems than they solve.[24] As a reminder that business ethics is a constant study, back in 1992 Robert Solomon noted ethically sophisticated businesses were seeking a synthesis between the three - teleology, virtue and deontology - an alliance not always compatible in the brutal battles of business competition.[25] The end result was leadership practices premised on shifting ethical processes toward an acceptable moral outcome.

Underpinning ethics, however, was a simple economic worldview with far reaching influence on the global business community - capitalism. Defined as an

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[24] Max Bazerman, "A New Model for Ethical Leadership," *Harvard Business Review*, October 2020, https://hbr.org/2020/09/a-new-model-for-ethical-leadership.

[25] Robert C. Solomon, *Ethics and Excellence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 28-29.

economic system under which all production, distribution and ownership is in private hands, capitalism can function successfully only in a profit or market system. That is, a business will produce and distribute only what will sell, which is assessed by consumer demand. Shaw and Barry point out, the success of capitalism as a social foundation has seriously limited any consideration of its 'theoretical and operational problems'. Because capitalist ideology broke the constraints of the medieval feudal system and allowed for individual imagination to drive profit, we now have cities full of consumer goods, material wealth and a higher standard of living than was ever imagined.[26]

Therefore, though businesses may limit their actions through ethical consideration, it is unlikely that they ever question the values of the underlying economic system on which those actions are formulated. In 1922 Jacob Viner set the platform for such economic thinking which still prevails today:

> 'Economics […] has no direct concern with the analysis of the processes whereby men acquire a consciousness of moral obligation, and it is in this limited field that ethics finds the bulk of its subject matter'.[27]

This being the case, the values of Western corporate business practice are in fact symptomatic of a prior acceptance of capitalism as an ethically justifiable mode of socioeconomic organisation. In broad strokes those adopted values are fourfold: A) the 'existence' of companies. B) the profit motive. C) Competition. D) Private property.[28]

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[26] William H. Shaw and Vincent E. Barry, *Moral Issues in Business*, 8th ed. (London: Wadsworth, 2001), 146.

[27] Hans J. Blommestein, "Why is Ethics Not Part of Modern Economics and Finance? A Historical Perspective," *Dans Finance & Bien Commun* 1, no. 24 (2006): 54-64. https://www.cairn.info/revue-finance-et-bien-commun-2006-1-page-54.htm.

[28] Shaw and Barry, *Moral Issues in Business*, 149-152.

A) The 'Existence' of Companies. It is not uncommon to read the statement, 'it is not in the company's best interest', or 'from the companies viewpoint'. These statements reveal a capitalist belief that a company is an entity in its own right apart from the people within it. Such corporations have legal rights and status that enables it to be sued, to sue, and to be held accountable for its own actions. Thus the corporation as a political entity has status and power.[29] Milton Friedman disagreed with this understanding by stating, "the only entities who can have responsibilities are individuals; a business cannot have responsibilities."[30] He acknowledged a limited concept of corporate social responsibility in that businesses that act in the best interest of shareholders maximise the benefits to all stakeholders. But this does not constitute a company identity apart from the people. Nonetheless, though Friedman may disagree with this, the fact remains that impersonal corporate identity has been the veil under which individuals have hidden from moral responsibility.[31] In a similar way, church leadership that acts for the benefit of the church against that of an individual because it is, 'in the best interest of the church', is a leadership exonerated under the same veil.

B) The Profit Motive. The reason for this hiding from moral responsibility is understood more clearly in the profit motive, which is commonly viewed as the axis of capitalism by promoting unfettered growth. Associated with the writings of Friedman, profit is seen as a social responsibility - worthy investment will always bring return; the

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[29] Michael Boylan, *Business Ethics*, Basic Ethics in Action. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001), 40-42.

[30] John McClaughry, "Freidman Responds," *Business and Society Review* no. 1 (1972): 5-16, Wiley Online Library, 6.

[31] Thomas Carson, "Friedmans's Theory of Corporate Social Responsibility," *Business and Professional Ethics Journal* 12, no. 1 (1993): 3-32, JSTOR, 6-8.

greater the investment, the greater the return. Because capitalism was born in the cradle of Judeo-Christian values, the giving of alms or sacrificial beneficence can only ever be a reasoned portion of profit – the more profit, the more alms. At its basis is a belief that humans are economic creatures motivated by self-interest alone.[32] Here we find a reason behind the development of impersonal corporate identity. If we ask the question, 'do corporate executives, provided they stay within the law, have responsibilities in their business activities other than to make as much money for their stockholders as possible?' Our answer will interpret our understanding of 'corporation.' Judging by financial scandals, in the U.S., UK and Europe (particularly after the global financial crisis), the answer to the question is often, no.[33] The profit motive often connects seamlessly with numerical church growth as a justification for a churches actions. If the church is growing, then, ipso facto, it is meeting a legitimate need that is beyond question. The growth speaks for itself. What God blesses, always sees growth.

C) Competition. What limits the profit motive ethically is competition. Here competition is perceived as the 'just' mediator in an economic system driven by self-interest.[34] If access to raw materials is unregulated, then other equally self-interested profit seekers will balance the 'power' desires of their opponents. Unjust price coercion, or employee exploitation is countered in a free market by other businesses that sell

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[32] Milton Friedman, "The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase Its Profits," in *Business Ethics,* (New York: Macmillan publishing Co., 1993), 162-167.

[33] Jon Entine, "Rethinking Standards of Corporate Responsibility," *Ethical Corporation Magazine* 16, (2003): 28-30.

[34] Ibid.

cheaper and treat people fairly.[35] Likewise, dishonesty will always be dealt a blow by the more honest competitive actions of others. However, this places too much responsibility on the moral prowess of the consumer. If, in fact, we are economically self-interested, then why should the consumer be any more scrupulous than a competitive business person or organisation? They do not. The only way competition can be controlled is if the population of people wanting to make a profit believe that certain actions are wrong on the basis of normal moral consideration, then it would follow that a professional in a business environment would be likewise responsible for acts that are unjustifiable by the same consideration – despite the profit motive. Therefore it seems to clear that the profit motive is not morally neutral and competition is not capable of mediating with any reasonable balance of power. Despite the global claims that competition within a capitalist economic framework has lifted people from poverty, it has also significantly increased the wealth distribution gap, and with it, any illusion of balanced competition.[36] In 1999 I attended a Baptist conference run by the Spreydon Baptist Church (the largest Baptist church in the country) for church leaders in Christchurch, New Zealand.[37] One of the workshops was held in a small Presbyterian church just around the corner. At that workshop, one of the attendee asked the minister of the church what it was like doing ministry in the shadow of the beast? He answered, "almost impossible." Despite the best intentions of Spreydon Baptist, it absorbs all the community funding available from local

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[35] James Michelman, "Some Ethical Consequences of Economic Competition," in *Business Ethics. A Philosophical Reader,* ed. Thomas I. White, (N.p.: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1993), 33.

[36] Donald K. Sharpes, "Capitalism, Income Inequality, and Education," *US-China Education Review* 5, no. 1 (2015): 775-782.

[37] Spreydon Baptist is now now called SouthWest Baptist.

bodies and constantly draws members away from smaller community churches. Likewise, the pastor of Spreydon holds a political voice that is heard in local government above all others.

D) Private Ownership. This is the final value in capitalism. What is owned is more than material possession. Capital, intellectual thought and the economic resources of a nation are owned privately. All profits or losses made from the resources belong to the owners. Consequently, decisions made about how a product, manufacturing plant or some service operation should operate are not made on the needs of the people, but rather on the profit to be gained by the owner. Using what is privately owned to accumulate more is the heart of capitalist ideals.[38] It is not difficult to see the values connection between the profit motive and that of numerical church growth, but the questions, 'who is the accumulating owner?' and 'on whose behalf are decisions about spiritual assets being made if the asset is the church?' When McGavran and Wagner made numerical growth the symbol of missional commitment, it became the benchmark by which congregational ministry was measured. If spiritual losses were being incurred, it was the local corporate church that was being offended, not the individual. Subsequently, in order to protect the 'church' as an entity with ownership rights, the place of people shifts from being ends in themselves (owners), to becoming means to an end (assets used and owned).

Over the last 35 years these four values have become a common foundation for ethical debate within businesses during times of failure. The Wall Street collapse of 1987 catalysed a need to consider the ethics of business practice. The immoral, yet legal, financial behaviour of individuals and corporates in the global financial crisis of 2008

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[38] William H. Shaw, *Business Ethics*, 3rd ed. (London: Wadsworth, 1999), 126.

revealed again the inability of competition to hold individuals to account and the ways that neo-liberal economics masks its social failure behind perceived benefits. Of greater significance however, is the debate about the ethics of these four values that underpin capitalist actions that are useful in assessing the impact of integrating business practice on the values of Christian leadership over the last five decades.[39]

The Quiet Pushback

In the Protestant world, Eugene Peterson is perhaps the best known and most accepted critic of modern Christian leadership because he offered a unique umbilical cord between pastoral leaders and their biblical and historic understanding of pastoral ministry. Peterson's distinctive scholastic intellect moulded in the furnace of his ordinary daily pastoral ministry and provided an incarnational model for those struggling in the new world of competing social, theological and corporate voices. To such people, Peterson was a revolutionary poet.[40] His books reconnected tens of thousands of modern leaders with the people of scripture, the mothers and fathers of faith, the nature of ministry, and the God who calls. In perhaps his most polemical book, *Working the Angles,* Peterson claimed there are three 'angles' to ministry practice that are non-negotiable: 1. opening the scriptures 2. praying for the congregation 3. spiritually

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[39] The sociologist and political economist, Max Weber, was representative of a number of 19th and 20th century economic thinkers who acknowledged the Puritan and Calvinistic concept of individual responsibility and ownership as powerful motivators for the future of economic and social wellbeing. Such a theological dispostion prepared the soil for our current socio-econimic thinking and planning. See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Routledge, 20011930) 59ff.

[40] Dean Pinter. "Ministry Lessons From the Life of Eugene Peterson." Christianity Today. Last modified 23 October, 2018, https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2018/october-web-exclusives/ministry-lessons-from-life-of-eugene-peterson.html.

directing individuals on their journey of faith.[41] The driving values of the pastor are based on the spiritual care of each person, and the community of those persons, not the institution of the church nor the economic/philosophic aspirations of a nation.[42] In this sense the values of a business based on a capitalist world view versus those of pastoral ministry are not remotely the same. Even at the superficial level of simple goal setting, the values of the two are different. Though management of people is required in church life and there needs to be responsibility for the way in which people and resources are managed, the ends are not the same. In business practice all actions are intended to achieve specific goals (usually profit) thus making employees a means to that end by working to produce, market and sell a product. Being the 'means' to achieve that end tends to mean employees are generally treated fairly and justly, and though virtue, consequence or duty may direct a business' attitude towards its employees and clients, they are still ultimately considered 'means.' Christian ministry is the reverse of this; and here lies the essential difference - the church is the people. That is, the people are not the clients of the church or the workers – they are the church.

Again, the values of the profit motive differ from Christian values. Within the church profit cannot be measured. If there are more people in one congregation than another, a business value would suggest the larger of the two has made profit - but in what way? There is no measurable profit for the congregation other than the gain of knowing that a person who was 'lost' spiritually, has been 'found'. When numbers are used as a basis for measuring success, the theological value of the congregation

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[41] Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*, Chapter 3.

[42] For a thought provoking analysis of post-enlightenment spiritual paradigms, see Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith : Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World*, 121f.

'belonging to God' is undermined. Success in Biblical terms is rooted in faithfulness. Though fruitfulness may indeed follow it is presumptive to assume what the fruit might be.[43]

> "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labour of each." (1 Corinthians 3:6-8).

Furthermore, the value of competition as a 'just' arbiter between powers is at odds with Christian theology. Christian leaders and their congregations are not in competition with anyone. Though theologically one might suggest that there is a competition for the souls and minds of people, all too often that mission becomes competition between congregations for members. The Apostle Paul referred to competition in his illustrations of running a race and the effort involved. However, the image is not of competition between leaders, laity or congregations, but against the struggles of 'life' (1 Corinthians 9). A central value of Christianity is assisting the last, least and the lost to move through life with the greatest possible hope and meaning (Matthew 25:40-45). The ministry value of equal human worth before God drives Christian ministry and communal life.

With the advent of technology, the needs of the world are not only more apparent to us, we have almost instant access to human crisis. Church communities across the globe have considered, not so much the ethics, but the theology of private ownership in relation to human need. Broad Christian theology claims that everything we see, touch and accumulate does not belong to us (Ps 24:21). Everything exists for the benefit of all

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[43] The book of Job provides the clearest illustration of honoured faithfulness amid loss and turmoil at the behest of God. "Then Job arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell on the ground and worshiped. He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:20-21).

creation and ought to be enjoyed, used and shared to that end. Though philosophy generally excludes the notion of divine ownership, it does tackle the complex topic of justice in relation to merit and desert (reward and punishment). The controversial political philosopher, John Rawls, argued that there is no case for desert because no one can claim credit for prowess within the natural circumstances they did not create.[44] In this sense they are merely recipients of a natural lottery. Yes, they can expect rewards from their efforts within the natural order, but those expectations must be meritoriously legitimate – they are not positional entitlements.[45] There is a humility to all human endeavours and claims.

In this regard, during the earliest century of Christianity, ministers of the gospel have lived economically simple lives. Throughout the life of the Roman church the conflict of material ownership and economic accumulation was seen as detrimental to the spiritual health of the church. Certainly, the power brokers of the Roman church were wealthy, but for the most part priests lived simply. By valuing economic and material simplicity pastoral leaders were able to concentrate on the people to whom they ministered without the concerns of economic accumulation. By rejecting the value of economic self-interest they were able to be prophetic within the congregation and society at large.[46]

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[44] See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice: Original Edition* (N.p.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 106ff.

[45] For a complex critique of Merit and Desert see Catherine Wilson, "The Role of a Merit Principle in Distributive Justice," *The Journal of Ethics* 7, (2003): 277-314, SpringerLINK.

[46] Robert Wicks, *Touching the Holy: Ordinariness, Self Esteem and Friendship* (Note Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1992), 31-57.

The End Result

Despite the quiet pushback from pastors and theologians such as Eugene Peterson, Dallas Willard, Henri Nouwen, Frederick Buechner, Stanley Hauerwas and N.T Wright, in 1997 George Barna summed up the incontrovertible shift by stating "nothing is more important than leadership."[47] Yet, leadership based on what? In the same book, Jack Hayford wrote that the only values a minister requires are integrity and honesty.[48] Accordingly, Hayford did not examine whether the practice of leadership, in which his integrity and honesty was applied, was ethically reflective.

The integration of business practice into church leadership to achieve growth in the life of the declining church was to some extent successful, but was it an adaptation to the circumstances or a syncretistic mutation? The answer is, of course, both. It's not possible to 'adapt', without 'mutating' to some degree. As mentioned in chapter 2, belonging requires a 'learned' language,[49] tradition, and shared story in which multiples of different people may participate.[50] In adjusting to a late postmodern context now expressed in identity politics, the church did indeed mutate. However, the evidence shows that Christian leadership reacted to the philosophical and moral concerns of the moment by subscribing to the functional and success driven capitalism of corporations. In

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[47] George Barna, "Nothing is More Important Than Leadership," in *Leaders on Leadership,* ed. George Barna, (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1997), 17.

[48] Jack Hayford, "The Character of a Leader," in *Leaders on Leadership,* ed. George Barna, (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1997), 61-79.

[49] This is a common theoretical claim within linguistics. "The Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, also known as the linguistic relativity hypothesis, refers to the proposal that the particular language one speaks influences the way one thinks about reality." Lucy, John A. "Sapir–Whorf Hypothesis." In *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, (2015), 904.

[50] May, *Language and Minority Rights : Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Politics of Language*, 28.

doing so church leaders now find themselves in an identity political environment trying to strip the world of the very corporate models church leaders adopted, in order to find a voice for marginalised minorities. Consequently, the recycling question of Christian history is, what sort of accommodation is required or acceptable? As the last fifty years has shown, simply responding defensively or pragmatically to a changing landscape for mere institutional survival, career success and political status leaves Christian leaders and their communities weakened, often damaged and vocally disabled in complex times. Therefore, an alternative perspective is required.

In the following section the dissertation will not address the function of recent leadership models and their application to the current identity political environment, rather, it will consider a description of the Christian leader upon whom those models may rest. If indeed our social world has been reduced to ever diminishing identity groups, how will Christian leaders lead? How can they move freely among different identities with peace? On what basis will they choose their leadership models? Why will people follow them? What are their prior motivations? And, in what way will following them lead to others into Christ?

PART TWO: AN ALTERNATIVE PATH

Introduction

Learning through imitation has merit – indeed it is the way humans learn to live in all societies, both as individuals and groups. Consequently, imitation always has an end in mind, and that end is determined by those being imitated.[1] As René Girard sees it, imitation is not simply about learning how to act, it is the imitation of desire itself.[2] However, those desires are not always well articulated, or understood. Considering New Zealand Christian leaderships' imitation of corporate practices from the 1970's, we have already asked what was the desirous end? Was it the transformation and sustenance of human hearts and minds to be like God? Or, was it corporate survival in a competitive context?[3] In discussion with past church leaders, it seemed to be both.[4] When summarised, the desire was homogenous human transformation achieved through the

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[1] The study of human mimicry in children and adults is highly debated. However, the essentials of mimicry are agreed – people learn by watching, imitating and developing that behaviour through later comptetition. For an excellent summary of the debate see, Harry Farmer and others, "The Functions of Imitative Behaviour in Humans," *Mind & Language* 33, no. 4 (2018): 378-396, Wiley Online Library.

[2] Timo Airaksinen, *Vagaries of Desire*, ed. Robert Ginsberg and others, Value Inquiries Book Series, vol. 340 (Boston: Brill, 2019), 89.

[3] There is a good discussion of the Church redescribed as an organisation in which faith is practiced within the institution of the church. Rather than institution and faith being at odds with each other, rather the way in which faith practices are institutionalised can be a gift to the world. Geoff Moore, "Churches as Organisations: Towards a Virtue Ecclesiology for Today," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 11, no. 1 45-65, Taylor and Francis Online.

[4] During interviews with elders and pastors from different denominational backgrounds who had served in those roles since the 1980s, a number of things stood out. First, half of those interviewed were no longer attending church in any form. Second, of those still attending church, the majority had migrated to historic denominations with an emphasis on tradition and liturgy. All were burned out by the comptition and conflict for growth in adherents and the ongoing requirements of pragmatic change. Spiritual formation they said, was formulted around conservative beliefs and practices that they themselves taught, but didn't entirely believe. Each of them were attempting to rediscover the simplicity of the faith they once knew.

mechanism of unreflective imitation; in this case, *a*cultural modernity's economic growth models.[5]

Inasmuch as Part One of this dissertation has been a survey of the response of Christian leadership to the postmodern era and the more recent global challenges of socially divisive identity politics, the church of New Zealand remains in critical decline.[6] In part, this comes from pragmatically mutating into the image of society itself, or setting itself against the world it is called to reach. This new era of critical social thinking and its attendant identity group divisions, requires not only an understanding of the current context and how it came to pass, but also to see the similarities between identity groups formation and, indeed, the formation of our diverse Christian communities. Knowing the similarities offers a path for Christian leadership to ask precisely what differentiates Christian groups from all others. Such differentiation must also include the hermeneutic gap between Christians themselves. Such an achievement requires moving beneath leadership mechanisms and simple virtues, towards an improved understanding of what drove the ministry of Jesus and his end goal.

What follows is not an attempt to create a new leadership model in what Jennifer Berger and Keith Johnston refer to as "volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous times (VUCA)."[7] Rather, it is an attempt to reconsider the way Christian leaders think about their actual desires. Only then can leaders understand why others choose to follow them?

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[5] Charles Taylor, "Two Theories of Modernity," *Public Culture* 11, no. 1 (1999): 153-174, 6-9.

[6] McCrindle, "Faith and Belief in New Zealand: A National Research Study Exploring Attitudes Towards Religion, Spirituality and Christianity in New Zealand".

[7] Berger and Johnston, *Simple Habits for Complex Times: Powerful Practices for Leaders*, 7.

What effect their leadership might have on those people? And the ongoing effect their leadership has upon their local communities?

Such questions are important if the church is to avoid becoming yet another identity political group among all other groups clamouring for its own voice and rights against all others. Rather, it must choose to move peacefully among all other groups as bearers of God's grace. Why? Because that was, and remains, the ministry of Jesus (Luke 4:18f; Ephesians 2:14f). A cursory survey of Jesus ministry shows him at ease with the celebrated, the powerful, the leper, the tax collector, the last, the least and the lost – all while bearing the incredulity of each group. Yet this is not a new programme, or style of leadership, it is a way of being long before leadership is acknowledged. It is perhaps best illustrated in Matthew 25:31-46 where the writer records Jesus telling of the apocalyptic judgement at the Parousia, when the Son of Man separates the sheep from the goats. Jesus claims a blessing on those who gave him food, water, shelter, clothing, healing and comfort. The response of those blessed, is revealing, "when?" The simple responsive query shows no sense of obedience to a command, no requirement for status, no personal gain – they acted according to the image already burned within them.[8] By providing for fellow disciples (and by extension all people), they lived Christ's life.[9] They did not aim to be blessed, they were acting as the 'already blessed', long before it was recognised. In this way Christian leadership is the end result of becoming an exemplar long before it is followed. Therefore, what is the nature of shoulders upon which the title 'leader' is

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[8] Stuart Briscoe, *The Preachers Commentary*, Olive Tree Bible Electronic ed., vol. 1-35 (N.p.: Thomas Nelson, 2016).

[9] Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Accordance electronic ed., Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33B (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 744.

placed? What is required for such a person to move freely among diversity such that others choose to follow that freedom? To that end I wish to explore what happens when three Christian experiences are bought together under the banner of Christian leadership, and how doing so may reframe the chosen actions of Christian leaders in local, yet diverse contexts. They are *desire, theosis and kenosis.*

In the following section, I will first consider is René Girard's theory of mimetic desire and its implications to the formation of all societies and groups – their rivalry, competition, violence, scapegoating and redemption. Girard's theory describes the 'nature' of all groups and provides a framework for a leader's self-understanding within and among their people, and those people who chose to 'follow' them. It also provides insight as to why peacefully mingling with rivalrous groups requires a different understanding of Christian life and leadership. Second, Michael Gorman's concept of cruciformity explores theosis (aim) and *kenosis* (action) as the basis of Christian discipleship. Pulling these two theories together reveals a different way of understanding the world and the function of the church and its members in complex social settings. It additionally offers the possibility of reframing the way Christian leadership is discussed – it moves from what a leader does, to whom a leader imitates, why, and how?

CHAPTER 5:

LEADERSHIP & DESIRE :

THE MIMETICS OF RENÉ GIRARD

René Girard

Since the beginning of the 21st century the emergent research on imitation, or mimesis[1] in human culture, has taken the study of humanities and social sciences by surprise.[2] René Girard's mimetic thesis in 1961, was long understood as being little more than the concern of aesthetics (in the sense that art imitates life). It was seen a basic description of social copying associated with child development and the acquiring of tradition.[3] However, ongoing development and research in the social sciences generally began to support René Girard's thesis that human desire is also powered by mimetic behaviour. People want what other people want so they copy those desires, and as a result, competition, jealousy and interpersonal struggle ensue. Thus, Girard reasons that mimesis should be understood as the origin of human conflict. Mimetic desire often results in escalation of rivalry toward violence. The only way people have found to quench that destructive outcome is though scapegoating. This Girard claims, is a signal

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[1] Mimesis is a term used differently in different contexts, though it has the same basic root meaning. Within the arts, mimesis is the way in which art imitates life or literature. In the world of anthropology, mimesis the behavioural imitation by one group of another to a particualr end. The same is true of individuals. Mimesis, as a theory of human behaviour, has its roots in Plato and Aristotle. see Aristotle. 4BCE. "Poetics." Spark Notes. Accessed 12 December, 2020. https://www.sparknotes.com/philosophy/poetics/full-text/chapter-iv/.

[2] S Garrels, "Human Imitation: Historical, Philosophical, and Scientific Perspectives," in *Mimesis and science: empirical research on imitation and the mimetic theory of culture and religion,* ed. S. Garrels, (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2011).

[3] M. Packer, "Mimetic Theory: Toward a New Zealand Application," *Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand* 44, no. 4 (2014): 152-163. Taylor & Francis Online, 152.

feature of (particularly religious) human history. Because of this radical assessment, Girard has been dubbed, "the new Darwin of human sciences."[4]

In truth, the re-emergence of mimetic theory has its genesis in the advent of the internet and the copying of ideas and culture through global social media and information access. Copyright, plagiarism and imitative bullying are all features of mimetic behaviour and of course its companion, scapegoating.[5]

Not everyone agrees of course. Scholars like Joshua Landy find René Girard's mimetics somewhat confounding because Landy claims that individuals must have personal authentic desires apart from those of others, because it doesn't work in ordinary experience. According to Landy:

> If I decide to go swimming, for example, it is not because the human metabolism thrives on exercise, or because my physique in particular demands an upper-body workout, but only because I see the Joneses next door packing their towels.[6]

For Landy, this is absurd and his arguments against Girard cover everything from homosexuality to Brussel sprouts, to show that desire is not universally mimicked,[7] and ultimately concluding where he begins, mimetic theory simply is not true.[8] He concludes:

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[4] M. Serres, "Receiving René Girard Into the Académie Française," in *For René Girard: essays in friendship and truth. Studies in violence, mimesis, and culture series,* ed. S. Goodhart and others, (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2006) 5.

[5] *Packer, Mimetic Theory: Toward a New Zealand Application*, 153.

[6] Joshua Landy, "Deceit, Desire, and the Literature Professor: Why Girardians Exist," *Republics of Letters* 3, no. 1 (2012): 1-21, https://arcade.stanford.edu/rofl/issues/volume-3-issue-1, 3.

[7] Ibid, 7.

[8] Ibid, 21.

> All of which leads to an inevitable question: what's the difference between Girardianism and Scientology? Why has the former been more successful in the academy? Why is the madness of theory so, well, contagious?[9]

However, Landy does not offer an alternative perspective on the nature of desire and its appropriation of conflict and violence. His principle concern is with the daily exercise of freewill, which is problematic, because he assumes freewill is the basis of human decision making. Likewise, he does not address his position on the nature of freewill versus determinism. Again, all his complaints are framed within basic human physical needs such as warmth, hunger, thirst and so on. The irony of his argument is that those desires are essentially pre-determined. He, like many of Girard's critics goes on to say he is not trying to destroy the notion of mimetic desire, only that it is not universal.[10]

For the most part, philosophers and social scientists have found Girard's theory enticing given the plethora of journal articles and books attempting to understand the implications of mimetics for any given field. Though they may not agree with all his assumptions around literature and cultural appropriation, they recognise the competition and violence of Girard's mimetic desiring in the everyday life of humanity; religious and cultural. Consequently, there is very little research critiquing Girard's mimetic theory as a purely secular model on its own. This is because Girard was clear that he understood his perspective offered a renewed vision of Christianity as the only remedy for human

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[9] Landy, *Deceit, Desire, and the Literature Professor: Why Girardians Exist*, 3.

[10] Ibid, 2, footnote 4.

scapegoating in religion and culture.[11] Indeed, it was this that converted him to faith again.[12]

So, what is mimetic theory?

Subject, Object and Mediator

In 1965, Girard's profound book, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel,* was translated into English. It was a close reading of five major novelists of the time: Cervantes, Stendhal, Flaubert, Proust, and Dostoevsky. Among the novels Girard saw a common thread which he referred to as a 'mediated desire' that always led to conflict. Simply illustrated, if the action or desire of a person named John is rooted in the imitation or a person called Peter, it means that both John and Peter will be reaching for the same object - in doing so, they become rivals. When one rival recognises the others interest, their desire for the object multiplies its value. Therefore, if Peter tries to thwart John's efforts, the positive feedback loop intensifies.[13] Family feuds, love triangles and squabbles among siblings reveal such a pattern – the inclination of the one, inspires the others. In *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard notes that when mirrored interests become too intense, the original object of desire can vanish as the focus of desire becomes the rival. In so doing,

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[11] René Girard, "The Anthropology of Christ," in *The Girard Reader,* ed. James G. Williams, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), 268.

[12] René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford, California: Stanford Press, 1987), 176.

[13] René Girard, "Mimesis and Violence," in *The Girard Reader,* ed. James G. Williams, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), 9.

the intensity of hostility between the two escalates as 'interest' is added to every subsequent interaction – and such increasing hostility rarely burns itself out.[14]

Girard's thesis is not complicated, but it is radical. Firstly, he is saying that individuals do not desire an object, value or a behaviour in a direct way.

Desiring something is not based on the intrinsic value of an object or human gesture, nor does it flow from some hidden internal motivation, as in the Freudian model.[15] Rather, people imitate what other people desire or appreciate; what other people are attracted to or what repels them, and even what they resent.[16] Underlying the desire is the search for personal meaning and place in the local and wider world.[17] It is like being stuck in social gravitational field.[18]

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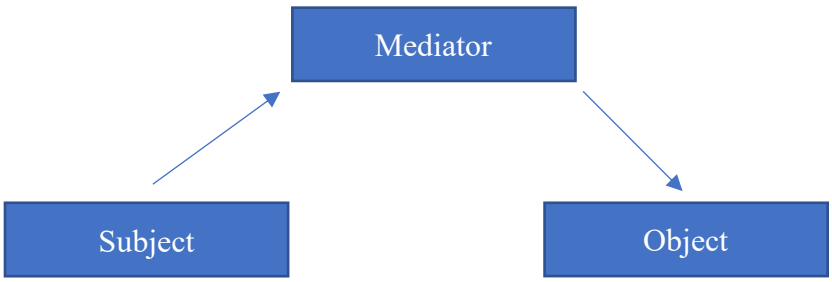
[14] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Gregory Patrick (London: Continuum, 2005), 161.

[15] Freud understood human actions to be driven by unconscious desires and fears. These remain hidden in the psyche until they are unlocked through psychoanalysis.

[16] There is a side question about the first mimetic experience. Is this a domino model of human behaviour? If so, where did is begin? Biblically it begins in Genesis 3:5 with the tempation to "be like God". In this case it is not about the intrinsic value of the desire, it is about equality of meaning and position in the order of things – God becomes the mediator of the desire – "be like."

[17] For insight regarding Girard's mimetic theory on the fashion and marketing industry see, David J. Burns, "Mimeticism and the Basis of Value: Toward a Theory of Fashion Marketing," *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing* 1, no. 1 (2012): 4-50, Taylor & Francis Online.

[18] Scott M. Thomas, "Culture, Religion and Violence: René Girard's Mimetic Theory," *Millenium* 43, no. 1 (2014): 308-327. SAGE Journals, 311.



The subject desires through a mediator, who desires an object. The object is not central, it is the desire for the object that is mimicked. Children do it with children, parents, then with peers, and finally throughout their adult life.

In questioning the idea that people can desire autonomously, Girard undermines the more accepted rationally-minded Cartesian individual.[19] Descartes wrote,

> It is part of the very nature of the will to have a very broad scope; and it's a supreme perfection in man that he acts voluntarily, i.e. freely; this makes him in a special way the author of his actions and deserving of praise for what he does.[20]

Accordingly, Girard's thesis is a kind of behaviourist alternative to more traditional autonomous learning models; we are interdependent with the desires and mental states of mediators, and those mediators come in two forms – external and internal.

Mediation is considered as external when the distance between the subject and mediator requires that the two will never meet. In this case, the mediator becomes a transcendent hero to the subject, who "worships his model openly and declares himself his disciple;" rivalry is unlikely.[21] If the mediation is internal, the distance between the

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[19] For discussion regarding the mind's freedom see René Descarte, Principles of Philosophy, ed. Jonathan Bennet, trans. John Cottingham (Early Modern Texts, 2017). https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/descartes1644part1.pdf, Part I, 6, and 39.

[20] Ibid, Part I, 37.

[21] René Girard, *Deceit, Desire & the Novel : Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (London: John Hopkins, 1976), 9.

subject and mediator is close enough for the possibility of rivalry. The mediator who stirred the desire in first instance becomes an obstacle to the desire; "the model shows his disciple the gate of paradise and forbids him to enter with one and the same gesture."[22] However, despite the rivalry that can erupt, the subject may continue to secretly admire the mediator as they remain the source and example of that desire. According to Girard, internal mediation, "triumphs in a universe where the differences between men are gradually erased." [23] In an age of globalised interconnectedness, the gap between external and internal mediators is significantly reduced. Technological and social revolutions have overwhelmed conventional social barriers and hierarchies. Relationships among individuals are local and international, yet increasingly they are internally mediated. Our worldwide consumer society may be liberated, but it is also the most competitive in human history.[24] The end result of internal rivalry is invariable conflict, online and in-person.

Conflict and Violence

Though not new, over the last twenty years the world has witnessed an increase in conflict between religious groups, tribal groups and political factions. Last century these skirmishes were observed from a distance as the media reported on events in different parts of the world. However, this last century has seen the mass migration of people groups from one country to another, the burgeoning of internet news feeds, live video

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[22] Ibid, 8.

[23] Girard, *Deceit, Desire & the Novel : Self and Other in Literary Structure,* 14.

[24] M. Packer, "Mimetic Theory: Toward a New Zealand Application," *Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand* 44, no. 4 (2014): 152-163, Taylor & Francis Online, 154.

from private citizens broadcast on YouTube, and an increase in cross border terrorism creating fear in countries that considered themselves immune from such things. And much of the violence has been at the hands of religious groups. Despite this, it's almost certain that after a religious act of violence, religious and political leaders will be heard saying that it has nothing to do with religion and that most religions, when understood correctly, are purveyors of peace. The horrors are only being unleashed by misdirected fanatics, militants and fundamentalists who wish to manipulate religion for political ends. Consequently, there has been plenty of thought given to the nature of religion and violence. Scott Appleby spoke of the "ambivalence of the sacred," in which he contrasted the best of religion and how it ends up connected with the worst forms of violence. He followed Rudolph Ott's view that the "holy and sacred" are both the fascinating and terrifying essentials of religions emotional and irrational core. In part Ott described the basis for German cultural and religious irrationality during in World War I, contrasted with their later calls for peace.[25]

Girard takes a very different and confronting approach. In *Violence and the Sacred* he writes, "Violence is the heart and secret soul of the sacred." [26] He does so because his mimetic approach is essentially a theory of religion in which the sacred and sacred violence are the foundations upon which societies myths, social order, peace and unity rest. However, to understand this, it needs to be clarified that "religious violence" for Girard is not an abstract concept, as Scott Thomas explains.

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[25] Scott M. Thomas, "Culture, Religion and Violence: René Girard's Mimetic Theory," *Millenium* 43, no. 1 (2014): 308-327. SAGE Journals, 308.

[26] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 31.

> Substantive definitions ignore or consider unproblematic what mimetic theorists and social constructivists in theology, religious studies and international relations consider essential: religion is a concept that is always socially, culturally and politically contested, negotiated and constructed. It is not a neutral descriptor of a reality in the world, which causes violence under certain conditions.[27]

For Girard (along with Derrida, Pascal and Montagne), our current experience of peace and justice and law all sit on a history of violence.[28] New Zealand's legal system came about through colonisation and land wars, which, in turn, came from a British system with its historic protection of slavery, unjust class structures and inherent racism. From the first contact between Māori and the British, the relationship was marked by mimetic competition and cross-cultural reckoning.[29] In America, many States still maintain the death penalty as a violent threat toward peace. It stands to reason, then, that Derrida should pronounce that not only is violence foundational to civilisation, it is also "buried, dissimulated, repressed," and is so for all societies.[30]

Thus, founding violence is a key component of mimetic theory because Girard links the formation of the scapegoat model (or ritual sacrifice) to religious violence, a model that remains as the primary mode of reducing community tension to this day. In fact, he goes so far as to reject any view that suggests religion is merely a group of ideas

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[27] Scott M. Thomas, "Culture, Religion and Violence: René Girard's Mimetic Theory," *Millenium* 43, no. 1 (2014): 308-327. SAGE Journals, 310.

[28] This is a bold ascersion. It is more comfortable to argue that our current understanding of peace and justice rest upon charity and advocacy. However, it is always the powerful in society who arbitrate charity, justice and law – and in a representative political system it is often the populist crowd who determine the politcal decisions of the powerful. See Douglas Murray, *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race and Identity*, Kindle ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).

[29] M. Packer, "Mimetic Theory: Toward a New Zealand Application," *Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand* 44, no. 4 (2014): 152-163. Taylor & Francis Online, 158.

[30] Jaques Derrida, "The Force of Law: The "Mystical" Foundations of Authority"," in *Deridda, Acts of Religion,* (London: Routledge, 2002) and Andrew McKenna, "The End of Violence: Girard and Derrida," *Lebenswelt: Aesthetics and Philosophy of Experience* 1, (2011), DOAJ.

or an ideology in search of ultimate meaning while avoiding the role of ritual sacrifice in any society's social, cultural or political bodies.[31]

The Antidote to Violence? The Scapegoat

Though the idea that religion has an almost symbiotic relationship with violence is less than palatable to any religious follower, an understanding of scapegoating provides some clarity on why it is the case, and why society operates the way it does.

All groups are drawn together out of common desires that are mimicked and mediated over time, both internally and externally. The eventual competition that builds into rivalry needs an emotional release otherwise a community destroys itself. Girard identifies scapegoating as the mechanism that enables that release to occur. The community, or leaders within a community, arbitrarily find a person, or a group of people who are then blamed for the internal discord and they are then killed or expelled. This gives the community someone to unite against rather than the community as a whole. In doing so, a stable human religious society is maintained and sustained. In Judeo-Christian terms this is witnessed in the day of atonement in Leviticus chapter 16. In Genesis 32-32 while Moses was on the top of Mount Sinai, the Israelites built a golden calf to alternative Gods. Upon Moses' return he commanded a violent punishment against random victims for the sins of the people to be performed by Levites whom he then blessed (Genesis 32:27-29). Moses then returned to the Mount Sinai to seek God's forgiveness for the nation. The day that Moses returned is considered the day of atonement (Genesis 33:1-5). On that day the liturgical act of Leviticus 16 is performed.

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[31] Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 224ff.

Two goats are randomly chosen. By lots, one is destined to be sacrificed for the actual sins of the people, while the other has hands laid upon it for the sins of the people to be caried from the city to the wilderness. The first goat is sacrificed as a punishment for actual sin, the second goat symbolises the lifting of sin from the people (Leviticus 16). The scapegoat is the physical symbol of a community cleansing its own violence in God's name. For Girard, it is due to this scapegoating mechanism that all religions and society's come into being: "There is no society without religion because without religion a society cannot exist."[32] Scott Thomas illustrates Girard's perspective in present reality.

> In any society, violence and the sacred are central to the foundations of culture, religion and solidarity – for without some concept of the sacred, without something being made sacred – a flag, the nation, the state, a race, an ethnic group, a class, a political party, an idea (socialism, capitalism, Marxism), an institution, a constitution, an individual or, indeed, the living God, without something people are willing to make sacred – to sacrifice for or be willing to sacrifice others for – a society cannot exist; it would tear itself to pieces. Violence is channelled in domestic society (inwards on a common scapegoat) and in foreign policy (outwards on a common enemy).[33]

In our current globalised and connected world, these internal and external forms of scapegoating overlap on a daily basis, and in doing so they strengthen one another.

However, it is essential that this mechanism is hidden in the unconscious parts of our minds. A community can never know that it is arbitrarily scapegoating a victim. A person may be marked in some way, which might include some kind of difference that justifies victimisation. The reasons may not be obvious to those outside, but they are damning for those within. Girard writes.

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[32] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 233.

[33] Scott M. Thomas, "Culture, Religion and Violence: René Girard's Mimetic Theory," *Millenium* 43, no. 1 (2014): 308-327, SAGE Journals, 314

> In strange surroundings, the situation of the one-eyed man may be worse than that of the blind…His one good eye seems more uncanny than the bad ones of the blind.[34]

Furthermore, to stop the rivalry and violence occurring again, Girard claims that two things must happen. First, a ritual, especially sacrifice, re-enacts the sacrifice made upon which society now exists. In New Zealand, this is the annual Anzac Day commemoration of the battle of Gallipoli. In a 2014 radio interview, then Prime Minister John Key claimed, "World War One changed how we see ourselves, and how the world also saw us," it "laid the foundation for the country we have become today."[35] Second, a myth is required. In this case it tells the story of an unnecessary and ill prepared battle against the Turks at the behest of British colonial powers. A tragedy of death and destruction that has strengthened and moulded our unity amid cultural diversity. Again, in New Zealand it is also the story of the treaty of Waitangi between the British Crown and Māori. Unlike other treaty documents it has not allowed for a unifying myth but rather a relationship of entrenched mimetic behaviour.[36] Each community and tribe (there are many) has its rituals, myths and scapegoats.

The Girardian thesis maintains that scapegoating is the deepest structural sin of humanity.[37] It is the foundation upon which the framework of religion and politics sits.

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[34] René Girard, "Generative Scapegoating," in *Violent Origins: Walter Burket, René Girard and Jonathan Z Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation,* ed. Robert Hammerton-Kelly, (Stanfod, CA: Stanford Universtiy Press, 1987), 104.

[35] Key, John. Interview. Radio New Zealand. Broadcast. 4 August, 2014.

[36] M. Packer, "Mimetic Theory: Toward a New Zealand Application," *Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand* 44, no. 4 (2014): 152-163, Taylor & Francis Online, 158.

[37] This raises the question of the person Satan and the tempation to sin. Girard has a fascinating and insightful essay on the mimetics of Jesus and Satan. What is the difference between the mimetic desire of Jesus and the mimetic desire of Satan? Prinicpally, Satan imitates God out of rivalry. Jesus imitates God

Girard sees it as demonic because it is entirely arbitrary regarding the choice of victim and it always gets the results it promises – peace, stability and social cohesion.[38] And, while we remain captive to the rituals and myth of church and society, we do not see our victims as scapegoats. As Mark Heim writes, "Texts that hide scapegoating foster it. Texts that show it for what it is undermine it."[39]

The End of Scapegoating

To this point, Girard maintains that all religions and societies are based on the scapegoating model. However, John Yoder makes the point that in the late seventies Girard began reading the gospel stories (in particular the account of Peter's denial) in such a way that he saw in the gospel accounts the inversion of his mimetic violence.[40] By assuming the role of innocent victim and not being arbitrarily chosen, Jesus destroys the credibility of his persecutors and their self-interest. The words of Caiaphas "You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed" (John 11:50) when compared with the words of Jesus, "they do not know what they are doing" show Jesus encouraging human violence to tip its hand. In doing so such violence reveals the internal self-justification - peace. In the crucifixion, it is God who has willingly stepped into the role of victim, but unlike all other arbitrary

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from an attitude of childlike innocence and obedience. As there is no covetous desire in God, the imitation of God cannot breed rivalry. See René Girard, "Satan," in *The Girard Reader,* ed. James G. Williams, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996).

[38] René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (JHU Press, 1989), 165f.

[39] Mark Heim, "The End of Scapegoating," *Institute of Faith and Learning* (2016): 20-27. Accessed 2 November, 2020. https://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/264317.pdf, 22.

[40] John H. Yoder, "The Scapegoat," *Religion & Literature* 19, no. 3 (1987): 89-92, JSTOR, 90.

victims, God cannot be hidden.[41] In other words, Jesus does not abide by God's perceived form of justice, rather, through Jesus, God succumbs to ours. There are opposites at work in the crucifixion. Jesus tormentors want his death to bring peace by allaying the rivalries of Romans and Jews alike. Thus, Jesus' accusers understand his death to be the normal formula though which peace is attained. In contrast, God had other plans.

It is often noted that the Bible is filled with violent narratives, and this of course turns many people off in a post-structuralist environment. Obviously, from a Girardian perspective, this concern is somewhat ironic given that all societies and their 'apparent' peace is the end result of violence.[42] Of course, that violence is sacrificial and therefore hidden for what it truly is. However, the Bible does not conceal human violence, it shows it for what it is, in all its gratuity and religious justification and it is through these violent stories that Girard upends any divine sanction of violence: Abraham is restrained from sacrificing Isaac (Gen 22). Joseph. as the sacrificial victim of his brother's rivalry, is the non-violent hero (Gen 37-50). The prophet's condemn the victimising widows and aliens and the innocent victims of the Psalms (Ps 68:5; 146:9). In the New Testament Jesus' passion narrative is raw innocence and visible victimhood.[43] All these accounts expose victimisation as the mechanics of historic religion and society. Why? Because from the cross-beam of torture came the words, "they do not know what they are doing" (Lk

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[41] Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 100ff.

[42] Andrew McKenna, *Introduction to Semia*, ed. A. McKenna, René Girard and Biblical Studies, vol. 33 (Atlanta: SBL, 1985), 7.

[43] Mark Heim, "The End of Scapegoating," *Institute of Faith and Learning* (2016): 20-27, https://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/264317.pdf, 23.

23:34), and while standing in awe of the scene the centurion says, “Surely this man was innocent.” (Lk 23:47).

This was Girard’s great moment of insight. Expecting to see a standard outworking of sacrificial violence through bloodthirsty crowds and unjust arbitrators making their case in the face of fabricated accusations, he found the reverse.

> One finds everywhere in the Bible collective violence similar to that which generates sacrifice, but instead of attributing responsibility for the violence to the victims—who are only conciliators in appearance, by virtue of the transference carried out against them at the expense of the truth—the Bible and the Gospels attribute it to its true perpetrators, the persecutors of the single victim. Instead of elaborating myths, consequently, the Bible and the Gospels tell the truth.[44]

Biblical violence is explicit and not hidden within a justifying myth because the story is told from the perspective of the victim, not the crowds; injustice and wrongdoing is laid bare. In these moments of Judeo-Christian history, scapegoating in all its forms is stripped of its sacred illusion.

As enticing as this alternative interpretation is, Yoder raised the blindingly obvious question of how such an interpretation could have been missed for so long and by so many scholars?

> But it was to take centuries, and now the pioneering deep cultural sleuthing of Girard, until the suspicion engendered by Jesus’ reversal could work its way up through the crust of mainstream historiographies.[45]

Perhaps the answer is in the behaviour of Jesus disciples. They were transparently revealed as being part of the collective persecution and abandonment by his followers,

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[44] René Girard, *Sacrifice*, trans. M. Pattillo and D. Dawson (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2003), x-xi.

[45] Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 90.

such that none could claim they resisted the sacrificial model of Jesus accusers.[46] This remains a tough pill to swallow, and consequently it is easier to subscribe to atonement theories based on sacrificial models that justify the violence of religion through the violence of God. In this sense Girard points out that when Christianity triumphed at the level of the state during the Constantinian era, the persecuted became the persecutors for all the reasons expressed thus far.[47] There is also the awkward problem of Scripture itself; the implication that all sacrifice is evil. Such a position is seen by some as a denial of the inspiration of the text. If the divine commands surrounding the Old Testament sacrificial system are seen as little more than a "long and laborious exit out of the world of violence and sacred projections" then the text can hardly be trusted.[48] However, Girard counters by claiming that the Old Testament is central to Christian faith and belief. Andrew McKenna sums up Girard's commitment to the Old Testament:

> the progressive revelation of the mimetic crisis in which culture originates, and to which culture persistently returns. What Scripture constitutes, from the story of Cain and Abel, of Jacob and Esau, of Joseph and his brothers, through the great prophetic imprecations against sacrifice ... is nothing less than a theory of human violence, as opposed to the foundational myths of paganism in which violence is divinized because its uniquely human origins are obscured.[49]

While there will be some who initially reject Girard's assertions based on a high view of biblical inspiration, they ought not be dismissed entirely. Instead, Girard's perspective offers an alternative framework from which to read the sacred text, not to undermine it.

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[46] Mark Heim, "The End of Scapegoating," *Institute of Faith and Learning* (2016): 20-27, https://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/264317.pdf, 24.

[47] Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 204.

[48] Raymond Schwager, *Must There be Scapegoats? Violence and Redemption in the Bible* (New York: Crossroads, 2000), 43.

[49] McKenna, *Introduction to Semia*, 7.

Girard's observations are useful because they can be continuously observed in action. Girard himself writes, "Untried ideas and theories should not be criticized in the abstract; they should be put to work. This is how we can find how useful they are."[50] Given our capacity to see it at work in religion, politics and individual life, it is not surprising to see its resurgence in the UK, America and Europe during political electioneering. The mimetic desires, rivalries and scapegoating, as seen in chapter 2, are being laid bare.

So the question must be asked, in what way does mimetic desire have any influence in Christian leadership thinking and practice? On its own, mimetics is merely a theory of human behaviour. However, it also offers a clarifying perspective about how the mimetic formation of identity political groups has led to the rapid subdivision of those groups through rivalry and competition and scapegoating to achieve internal peace.[51] As seen in chapters 3-4, within the Christian church worldwide, the same internal divisions and conflicts exist, and for the same reasons. All of which point to the complex relationship between mimetic desire and the need for harmony. It also reveals a gapping chasm between following or imitating Christ and the overarching desire for personal power.

Consequently, understanding the dynamics of mediated desire, the following chapter will connect Girard's mimetic theory with Michael Gorman's cruciform union of

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[50] James G. Williams, *Violence and the Sacred: Liberation From the Myth of Sanctioned Violence* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), vii.

[51] A simple example of this is the rising tension between transexual communities and feminism and the conflict of rights. Feminist refer to the rights of trangenderism as little more than 'female erasure'. The scapegoat for the feminists are all those maintaining political correctness as an ideology. For a somewhat cluttered view of the subject see: Jennifer Eales, "The Poetics of Coming Out and Being Out: Feminist Activism in Cis Lesbian and Trans Women's Poetic Narratives," *Humanities* 8, (2019): 122-141, https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0787/8/3/122.

theosis[52] and *kenosis*[53] as a bulwark against competition and conflict. *Theosis* as the essence of Christian desire and *kenosis* as the praxis by which *theosis* comes into being.[54]

[52] Theosis is becoming like God by participating in the life of God. However, the term and the experience it describes keeps the creature-Creator distinction. Theosis means taking on certain divine attributes. M.J. Gorman, "Romans: The First Christian Treatise on Theosis," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 5, no. 1 (2011): 13-34, EBSCOhost,17.

[53] Kenosis is normally translated as "self-emptying." In Christian theology it is associated with Paul's injunction to the Philippian church, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus…[who] emptied (kenosis) himself,…" (Philippians 2:5-7). The meaning of kenosis has been readily debated, principally concerning nature of Jesus kenosis – of what did Jesus empty himself? Molly Farneth, "The Power to Empty Oneself": Hegel, Kenosis, and Intellectual Virtue," *Political Theology* 18, no. 2 (2017): 151-171, Taylor & Francis Online, 158-159.

[54] M.J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009).

CHAPTER 6:

LEADERSHIP THINKING :

THEOSIS, KENOSIS AND DIFFERENTIATION

Having considered how human communities come into being through common mediated desires, and the oft seen conflict between subjects and mediators in the attainment of those shared desires, it becomes apparent that all groups face the same internal conflict over time. Likewise, the use of scapegoating as a mechanism to maintain peace is all too apparent as groups turn on each other for different reasons. If this behaviour is true for all communities, then it goes some way to explain the conflict between partisan identity political groups that have formed over recent years. Likewise it offers an insight into congregational and inter-church conflicts, all of which have leadership at the centre. This is important for Christian leaders to understand as it helps comprehend the shared desires that drives people to follow a leader and the inevitable conflicts that follow. It also reveals how powerful and destructive scapegoating is to the very love and peace the communities often yearn for in any Christian sense. So, it is against this backdrop of mimetic desire that we turn to Michael Gorman's cruciformity as the basis for a Christian desire that is distinct from a group, context and circumstance. For Gorman, it begins with theosis as the only proper desire, and is accomplished through *kenosis*. It is only through mimetic embodiment of Jesus imitation of the Father that a Christian leader can be truly differentiated - enough to live freely among all people.

Theosis

Theosis is transformation into the likeness of God. However, the image one has of God will of course determine what that likeness might look like. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus is recorded as constantly disabusing his disciples of their faulty religious notions. In chapter 10 of Marks Gospel, James and John seek positions of power in Jesus kingdom.

> You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. (Mark 10:42-44)

In 1st century Palestine leadership was related to production and control through the wielding of power. If the request of James and John was based on that reality, then the angry response of the disciples confirmed their own offended desires to the same end. At the conclusion of the passage Jesus declares that leadership in his kingdom is inverted, the greatest leader is in fact the slave of all (Mk 10:44).

This is not simply a new model of leadership, rather it is part of a soteriological paradigm shift for all disciples. It is what Michael Gorman refers to as "cruciformity" or "being formed into the image of the Lord." He also refers to it as "theoformity." [1] The Apostle Paul crafted this theme in Philippians 2:4-5, "Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus." Consequently, to become like God, is to become like his Son who "emptied (*kenosis*) himself" (Philippians 2:7). In claiming that the heart of greatness is

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[1] Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology,* 2.

the pouring out of oneself for the benefit of others, Jesus wasn't pedalling a new leadership technique, he was proposing a different worldview.[2]

The doctrine of *theosis* is a theological promise – that God became human so that humanity may become God.[3] Dating back to the 3rd and 4th century, these were the words of Athanasius of Alexandria as he wrestled with the nature of the incarnation. Christ didn't merely become human to clean up the human mess, but rather to create a glorious new potential for humanity.[4] Likewise in more contemporary writing the same theotic theme is picked up in the C.S. Lewis's The Lion the Witch and Wardrobe.

> Did you hear what he said? Us lions. That means him and me. Us lions. That's what I like about Aslan. No side. No stand-off-ishness. Us lions. That meant him and me.[5]

In the early centuries of the church, the apostolic fathers' use of *theosis* was principally a defence against Gnosticism, eventually developing into church doctrine in later centuries. The biblical basis for *theosis* as an apologetic is fivefold: Genesis 1:26; 2 Peter 1:4; Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18, and finally 1 John 3:2.

Interpreting Genesis 1, the Greek fathers understood that in the fall the divine 'likeness' was undone, though the 'image' was preserved.[6] Consequently, through the

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[2] David Hooper, "Cruciformity, Differentiation, and Christian Spiritual Formation," *Discernment: Theology and the Practice of Ministry* 3, no. 1 (2017): 1-18. Accessed 14 October, 2020, 3.

[3] Michael Paul Gama and Gerald L. Sittser, *Theosis: Partristic Remedy for Evangelical Yearning At the Close of the Modern Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017), xviii.

[4] Dan Graves. "Article #12 "for He Was Made Man That We Might be God."." Last modified 2020, https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/incontext/article/athanasius.

[5] Gama and Sittser, *Theosis: Partristic Remedy for Evangelical Yearning At the Close of the Modern Age*.

[6] The liberal protestant theologian, Paul Tillich, coined the phrase, "Essentially good but existentially estranged" to clear up the confusion between the good image of God in which we are made

incarnation, the "likeness" is restored, and humanity is once again embraced in the life of God.[7] Michael Austin makes it clear that in the discussion surrounding *theosis*, there is a clear distinction between the divine as the 'essential', and the created as a 'derivative'. God necessarily exists, while we do so contingently. We participate in God's knowledge, virtue and love; we do not become them.[8] And this is the idea that 2 Peter 1:14 proposes, 'participation' restores the lost 'likeness' while the rest of 2 Peter reveals how disciples can flourish into that likeness.[9] For the Apostle Paul in Romans 8:29 sin is the cause, while participation in Christ is the is the solution, they share in God's righteousness and glory.[10] In 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul continues the same language of "into his image," the image and likeness into which humanity was made. Again, in 1 John 3:2, the writer reminds the believers that the transformation is taking place; they are currently being changed to be, "like him."

John Hooper askes the question, "If transformation into the image of God is the purpose of the Christian life, the next questions become, "What does that image look like, and how does it work?"[11]

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and the concept of inherited depravity. Roger Olsen has a helpful section on historic Christian understanding of of humanity in, Roger E. Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 201-222.

[7] Michael W. Austin, "The Doctrine of Theosis: A Transformational Union With Christ," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 8, no. 2 (2015): 172-186, Gale Academic, 180.

[8] Ibid, 181.

[9] David Hooper, "Cruciformity, Differentiation, and Christian Spiritual Formation," *Discernment: Theology and the Practice of Ministry* 3, no. 1 (2017): 1-18. Accessed 14 October, 2020, 4.

[10] Ibid, 4.

See also, M.J. Gorman, *Romans: The First Christian Treatise on Theosis*, 23.

[11] David Hooper, "Cruciformity, Differentiation, and Christian Spiritual Formation," *Discernment: Theology and the Practice of Ministry* 3, no. 1 (2017): 1-18, 5.

Kenosis

According to Michael Austin, and rephrasing the words of St Augustine, "The *kenosis* of Christ was the means chosen by God to achieve the *theosis* of humanity."[12] Michael Gorman understands *theosis* as participation, and that participation is in the kenotic character of Christ, who, enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit, participates in our humanity.[13] For Gorman, Philippians 2:6–11 summarises Paul's dominant story of the gospel that is about the counterintuitive, cruciform acts of God.

> who, though he was in the form of God,
> did not regard equality with God
> as something to be exploited,
> but emptied himself,
> taking the form of a slave,
> being born in human likeness.
> And being found in human form,
> he humbled himself
> and became obedient to the point of death—
> even death on a cross.
> Therefore God also highly exalted him
> and gave him the name
> that is above every name,
> so that at the name of Jesus
> every knee should bend,
> in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
> and every tongue should confess
> that Jesus Christ is Lord,
> to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:6-11)

In order to exegete the text, Gorman deliberates on the self-emptying (*kenosis*/kenów) of Christ in v6: was it the humbling of himself *although* he was God, or

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[12] Austin, *The Doctrine of Theosis: A Transformational Union With Christ*, 174.

[13] Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology*, 7.

because he was God? So how should *kenosis* be understood?[14] This is important precisely because Paul exhorts the believers in Philippi to have the same attitude (phroneō/φρονέω) as Christ, in v5.

This passage of Philippians, known as Carmen Christi, can be split in half: humiliation (2:6–8) and exaltation (2:9–11).[15] The first part has been described by Joseph Hellerman as the *cursus pudorum* (course of ignominy) of Jesus, in contrast to the *cursus honorum* (course of honour).[16] Hellerman helpfully reminds us that *cursus honorum* mimics the normal path to power by ambitious politicians in the Roman Republic as they climbed the ladder of influence and authority. In contrast Jesus is revealed as the *cursus pudorum*, undergoing a radical humiliation described by three main verbs (emptied/kenów, taking/λαμβάνω, becoming/γίνομαι) all modified by participles corresponding to the various social positions in the Roman empire.[17] Consequently, the *cursus pudorum* suggests that the incarnation is the self-emptying act of the pre-incarnate Christ, an act that continues with self-humbling obedience to the crucifixion itself.[18] It is the *cursus pudorum* of Jesus that is fundamental for understanding Jesus human nature

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[14] Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology*, 12.

[15] The exhortation is not, according to Gorman, the reward Jesus receives for his incarnation and death, but the recognition that his behaviour was in fact lordly, even godly. Ibid, 30.

[16] Philippians 2:6–8 is, according to Hellerman, a *cursus pudorum* the opposite of Rome's *cursus honorum*. J.H. Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honour in Roman Philippi: Carmen Christi as Cursus Pudorum* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 133.

[17] J.H. Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honour in Roman Philippi: Carmen Christi as Cursus Pudorum,* 130, 203.

[18] Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology*, 17.

together with the nature of God and the work of the church. And, by extension, its leadership.

In exegetical terms there are two areas of inquiry that determine any understanding of the nature of Jesus' *cursus pudorum*. The first is how the adverbial participle phrase "though he was in the form of God" (ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων) should be interpreted. The axis of any interpretation is the word, hyparchō /ὑπάρχω. Is ὑπάρχω…

i. A circumstantial participle, "who *being* in the form of God"
ii. A concessive participle, "who *although* he existed in the form of God"
iii. A causal participle, "who *because* he existed in the form of God"

The problem is that each of these choices are grammatically feasible. And here the disagreements begin. Hellerman claims the participle must be read as concessive ("although he was in the form of God") to protect the literary contrast between verses 6 and 7.[19] However, Gorman claims the answer depends on what perspective is used when reading the text. Is the humbling of Jesus viewed through the lens of Greco-Roman gods for whom humility did not exist, such that the action of Jesus, as God, contradicted conventions surrounding divine behaviour? Therefore, the concessive participle wins: "although he was in the form of God, Jesus actions were antithetical to his followers' expectations. Alternatively, should Jesus' humiliation be conceived as reflecting the unique character of God who is humble in regard to humanity? Therefore, the causal

[19] J.H. Hellerman, *Philippians: Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament*, EGGNT (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), 111.

participle takes precedence, "because he was in the form of God." [20] According to the last perspective, by "making himself nothing" Jesus was acting according to the character of God, rather than out of character. In this case, *kenosis* does not mean Christ's emptying himself of divinity, rather he is exercising divinity, his equality with God. As David Hooper puts it, "While this would still indicate an incredibly noble action, the word "because" is a paradigm changer." [21] Consequently, the cross reveals the divine majesty, and we gain a view of who God truly is.[22]

Gorman is not alone in his position.[23] Richard Baukham wrote, "humiliation belongs to the identity of God as truly as his exaltation does." [24] For John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan Reed, "humiliation belongs to the identity of God as truly as his exaltation does." [25] And N.T Wright concludes, the "real theological emphasis of the hymn ... is not simply a new view of Jesus. It is a new understanding of God." [26]

The Apostle Paul confirms the nature of God's servanthood in 1 Corinthians claiming that Christ crucified is, "a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to

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[20] Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology*, 22-23.

[21] David Hooper, "Cruciformity, Differentiation, and Christian Spiritual Formation," *Discernment: Theology and the Practice of Ministry* 3, no. 1 (2017): 1-18, 6.

[22] Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology*, 28.

[23] Gorman, M.J. *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology*, 9-10.

[24] R. Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1999), 61.

[25] J.D. Crossan and J.L. Reed, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus's Apostle Opposed Rome's Empire With God's Kingdom* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 290.

[26] N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 84.

Gentiles…. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength" (1 Corinthians 1:23,25). The context of *kenosis* in the *Carmen Christi* is the internal community relationships of the believers.[27] By having the same minds as Christ, the followers build on his example by imitating the same kenotic spirit and behaviour.[28] According to Moule, while everyday human judgement imagines Godlikeness to mean the wielding of power for oneself, Jesus saw it as giving and spending oneself out.[29]

The second exegetical consideration is how the rare form of the noun "exploited" (ἁρπαγμός) in verse 6 should be interpreted.[30] Generally, it means "grasping" or "holding on to." [31] However, is it something already possessed or something that needs to be taken. Roy Hoover rendered ἁρπαγμός as, "something already present and at one's disposal, not whether one possess something, but whether or not one chooses to exploit something for your own benefit."[32] Gorman translates Philippians 2:6 as "who *because* he existed in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited for *his own advantage*." Contrary to the actions of Roman aristocrats and their deities, Jesus did not

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[27] Gerald H. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, Accordance Electronic ed., Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 43 (2004), 89.

[28] David Hooper, "Cruciformity, Differentiation, and Christian Spiritual Formation," *Discernment: Theology and the Practice of Ministry* 3, no. 1 (2017): 1-18. Accessed 14 October, 2020, 7.

[29] C.F.D. Moule, "The Manhood of Jesus in the New Testament," in *Christ, Faith and History, Cambridge Studies in Christology,* ed. S.W. Sykes and J.P. Clayton, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 97.

[30] In this form, the word only appears here in the New Testament and has been a point of much debate, with little agreement. See. Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, 115.

[31] Newman M. Barclay, *Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 1993).

[32] R.W. Hoover, "The Harpagmos Enigma: A Philological Solution," *Harvard Theological Review* 64, no. 1 (1971): 95-119, 118.

exploit his power and status for his own gain. Nevertheless, neither did he discard it. *Kenosis* should not be understood as "stripping" away, rather it clearly describes for whose benefit a position or identity is used. It's in this sense that Louw and Nida define κενόω as follows,

> to completely remove or eliminate elements of high status or rank by eliminating all privileges or prerogatives associated with such status or rank — 'to empty oneself, to divest oneself of position.' [33]

Consequently, emptying (κενόω) qualified by exploited (ἁρπαγμός), is not getting rid of one's status or privileges, but not using it for self-advantage.

This perspective on the *Carmen Christi* has essential worldview implications for all followers of Christ since Paul had stated that they should share in the attitude of Christ (Phil. 2:5). Paul imitated Jesus in his kenotic ministry whilst expecting believers to follow his example of imitating Jesus, as is summarized in the Pauline dictum: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1).[34]

In 1 Corinthians 9:12 Paul writes, "If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we still more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ." Though Paul possessed an apostolic right to financial support, he sets aside the power of status for his own benefit, rather exercising it to serve the needs of the church in Corinth. A kenotic life for the apostle is not a denial of privilege (the receiving of financial support), but rather

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[33] J.P. Luow and E.A. Nida, *Greek-Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on semantic domains*, Accordance Electronic ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 740.

[34] Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology*, 22.

the exercising of it for the good of others.[35] Like Jesus, Paul is not acting out of character as an apostle, rather he is acting in character, since all apostolic ministry follows the pattern of Jesus' ministry.

Again in 1 Corinthians 7:4 "For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does." Though it is a complex subject in 2020, Paul explains that, while both women and men individually have rights or status since they possess their own bodies, they should not make use of that status and right for the satisfaction of their own needs, but rather that of their partner.

The implication of cruciformity is that the church must not just believe the gospel by intellectually upholding a list of declarations about the life and teaching of Jesus.[36] The church must also embody the *kenosis* of Christ as the mechanism of *theosis* – becoming cruciform. Ben Blackwell summarises,

> Through a variety of images, Paul returns again and again to the embodiment of Christ's death and life . . . embodying the Christ narrative is the central soteriological experience for believers… This participating embodiment is not merely for the sake of the individual; it also reorients believers to a reconstituted community. There is no simplistic separation between theology and practice or between individual and community.[37]

It is important to recognise that *kenosis* is no individual pastime, it is a collective activity. 1 Peter 2:9 articulates this community emphasis clearly, "But you are a chosen race, a

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[35] Ibid, 24.

[36] M.J. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission*, Kindle ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), chapter 1.

[37] Ben C. Blackwell, "You Are Filled in Him: Theosis and Colossians 2-3," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 8, no. 1 (2014): 103-123, 117.

royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."

The aim, or goal, of the Christian life is *theosis*, to become like Christ, and in turn, God. *Theosis*, then, requires *kenosis* as the practice of the life and death of Christ. As David Hooper concludes, "*Theosis* and *kenosis* are bound together in the term 'cruciformity'. Cruciformity is not only the end game of Christian maturity, it is also the operative paradigm for Christian leadership as Jesus states in Mark10:35-45."[38]

Differentiation

It is axiomatic that the concept of *kenosis* as the principal mechanism of *theosis* would be problematic to the average New Zealand Christian mind. As seen in part one, identity politics has subsumed individual identity within group identity. When applied to Christianity, *theosis* is no longer about an individual becoming like God, but rather the group imaging the Kingdom of God socio-theologically and politically. A group's primary identity models and defines both the nature of *theosis* and the specific tasks of *kenosis* through the unfolding partisan and pragmatic leadership models. Given that all groups have leaders, and those leaders are often defined by other leaders whom they wish to imitate, the question must be asked, is biblical *theosis* even possible?

In part, the answer is seen in the records of Jesus and the Apostle Paul. The humanity of Jesus is shaped by the will of his Father – in Jesus the true image of God is seen on the blackboard of a human life. His *theosis* remained, "The Father and I are one"

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[38] David Hooper, "Cruciformity, Differentiation, and Christian Spiritual Formation," *Discernment: Theology and the Practice of Ministry* 3, no. 1 (2017): 1-18, 8.

(John 10:30). He is the image of God, and his daily actions among the disciples and his final act upon the cross declared the self-emptying nature of God in human form. He constantly relinquished (*kenosis*) the wielding of divine power, which humans yearn for, in order deliver us the peaceable kingdom [39] because the resurrection of Jesus conquered all powers of violence.[40] In more ordinary human terms, the Apostle Paul wrestles with the nature of *theosis* and *kenosis* throughout his life and writing. For Paul, his epiphany of the risen Christ on the Road to Damascus in Acts 9 reformulates not only his past, but also the way in which his present experiences become moments of kenotic relinquishment. In the face of a renewed theotic vision Paul writes, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead." (Phil 3:10). This vision which he exercised in his kenotic activity is expressed best in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.

> For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I

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[39] See Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13 regarding Jesus temptation in the wilderness and the relinquishment of wielded power. See also, Isaiah 2:4 and 11:6-9.

[40] This assertion agrees, in principle, with the Christus-Victor understanding of the atonement. To quote Greg Boyd, "What Christ does for us cannot be separated, even theoretically, from what Christ does in us. One either participates in Christ's cosmic victory over the powers or they do not. If they do, their lives by definition will be increasingly characterized by the ability and willingness to overcome evil with good as they imitate the Calvary-quality life of Jesus Christ (Eph 5:1-2). The idea that one is "saved" by intellectually believing in the legal transaction Jesus allegedly engaged in with God the Father can thus be dismissed as magic." Greg Boyd. "The "Christus Victor" View of the Atonement." ReKnew. Last modified 29 November, 2018, https://reknew.org/2018/11/the-christus-victor-view-of-the-atonement/.

> might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

Jesus and Paul were differentiated from both the people they led, and the people they admired. If they were not, then the *theosis* of Christian leadership would no longer be to, 'become like God'. Rather, it would have been the group, institution, or a dogma's version of who that God might be. When this is the case, *kenosis* can be reduced to little more than bearing the neurotic crosses required for community belonging alone. These are the small crosses that guarantee our acceptance and future security within that community.[41] In doing so, leadership builds yet another identity politic where both the leader and the laity know their sense of place within the group, rather than knowing who they are despite the group. And this, of course, leads to the Girardian scapegoating of other groups to maintain internal equilibrium – there is an enemy to be fought.

Edwin Friedman uses the title "well-differentiated leader" drawn from family system theory. By this, he means someone who has clarity about his or her own life goals and is, therefore, less likely to become lost in the anxious emotional processes swirling about.

> Differentiation is the lifelong process of striving to keep one's being in balance through the reciprocal external and internal processes of self-definition and self-regulation. It is a concept that can sometimes be difficult to focus on objectively, for differentiation means the capacity to become oneself out of one's self, with minimum reactivity to the positions or reactivity of others.[42]

When Christian leaders are defined by the success of their ministry, then fear of relational discord ends in the persistent acquiesce of true *theosis* to alternative idolatrous

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[41] Wicks, *Touching the Holy: Ordinariness, Self Esteem and Friendship*, 63-64.

[42] Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, chapter 5.

images of dysfunctional peace. Friedman argues that this acquiescence is driven by a negative understanding of "self" as something to be denied because it is often associated with "autocracy and narcissism rather than with integrity and individuality."[43] "Denying yourself" as Luke 9:23 suggests, is not the eradication of the self, it is a *kenosis* enabling our true selves to emerge in Christ unimpeded by the exercise of power for our 'selves' alone. As Friedman writes, "Preserving community by eliminating self is as counter-productive as trying to prevent the scourge of fire by eliminating air."[44] In comparison, the advantage of the differentiated leader, who is in control of herself or himself, is the development a community that can grow in its ability to be genuinely inclusive, resilient, hopeful, and both willing and able to address complex problems. "A well-differentiated leader can separate while remaining connected, maintaining a modifying, non-anxious, and sometimes challenging presence.[45]

The Apostle John wrote,

> Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, got up from the table, took off his robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a bowl and began to wash the disciples feet and to wipe them with the towel that was around him. (John13:3-5).

Jesus self-understanding was the foundation for his self-emptying. Jesus was living into who he was as the image of the Father. The goal of discipleship is to live "in Christ" and thus toward that same image. This is cruciformity. As David Hooper puts it, "In the context of Christian spiritual formation and congregational leadership,

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[43] Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, chapter 5.

[44] Ibid, chapter 2.

[45] Ibid, chapter 8.

cruciformity provides the goal, motivation and perspective for leaders to avoid being lost in emotional [and institutional] processes."[46]

Implications

Gorman's cruciformity as the basis of a leader's differentiated identity means they are able to live and lead confidently among a community of people, with their conflicts and divisions, precisely because they are not defined by them. That same leader is also able to cross group boundaries to spend time with, learn from and enjoy the company of those outside their own group, dogma, religion or politic. Such leaders are prepared to empty themselves of rights, opportunities, personal hopes and agendas, along with personal privileges, for the well-being and formation of those through whom the cruciform mission of God may be fulfilled in any context.

Cruciform leaders reflect deeply about their environment, theories and theologies that inform their leadership practice. They do this because becoming like Christ as a leader within Christ's church is not a one-dimensional operation. Every context, conversation, division and pastoral encounter is about the formation of the other. They adapt to different contexts just as Jesus did and the prophets required.[47] As James Dunn wrote of Paul, "the experience of the exalted Christ shapes its faith and life into whatever language and lifestyle were appropriate" for the setting.[48] That adaptation is neither

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[46] David Hooper, "Cruciformity, Differentiation, and Christian Spiritual Formation," *Discernment: Theology and the Practice of Ministry* 3, no. 1 (2017): 1-18, 15.

[47] Walter Bruggemann speaks to Israels call to welcome 'others' and those of 'difference, even while the nation itself was differentiated as 'alien' among the nations. Walter Brueggemann, *Mandate to Difference* (Louisville, KY: 2007), 49-71.

[48] James D.G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament : An Inquiry Into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM, 1977), 305.

partisan nor pragmatic for success or survival. Such leaders pick up appropriate tools and then set them down, but they choose according to the needs and benefits of those they are leading, not their own preferences nor the personal whims of powerbrokers within, or the critical eyes of other respected leaders.

Consequently, cruciform leadership thinks and reflects carefully so as not to delude itself about the altruism of certain actions: what will a cruciform leader relinquish for the benefit and growth of the people in their care? What suffering will they willingly choose by either upholding or relinquishing a theological opinion, social standing, or moral instinct for the ethical and contextual contours of different societies and peoples?[49] Such a way of being is not to indulge moral relativism, pluralism or universalism for pragmatic ends. Rather, it requires the a leader to constantly think and reflect upon their deepest beliefs, values and desires when faced with conflicting circumstances and people of difference.

The picture of Christian leadership in a complex environment begins to emerge. If, as this dissertation asserts, that *theosis* is the principal mimetic desire of discipleship, and *kenosis* is the mechanism of shedding human self-interest to achieve that desire, it must be said that Christian leadership is a mimetic mediator for discipleship in all contexts. Mimetic cruciform leadership has the clarity and differentiation required in a postmodern, identity political world. But to what end?

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[49] Steve Fortosis, "A Model for Understanding Cross-Cultural Morality," *Missiology: An International Review* 18, no. 2 (1990): 163-176, SAGE Journals, 164f.

CHAPTER 7

LEADERSHIP TO WHAT END?

Likeness

If we take *theosis* as the basic desire of the Christian life, then our Christology becomes the platform from which that desire is sought. In this sense, Jesus words and actions become the hermeneutical principle in mimesis. By and large, imitating Jesus tends to be thought of in terms of Christian customs. Thomas à Kempis understood the imitation of Christ as the transformation of a personality into Christ's likeness.[1] However mimetic theory may also require that likeness to include pacifist ideals. Over the last two millennia, the western church has vocalised a strong commitment to the outward ideal of imitating Christ, despite the all to frequent contextual violence in which those claims were made.[2] In fact much of the violence was performed as an act of imitating Christ. It requires very little research to see how the overarching call to imitate Jesus has survived the Christianised centuries by being labelled an 'ideal' and 'otherworldly' reality that is still yet to come.[3] In 2007, as a presidential candidate, Barack Obama referred to Reinhold Niebuhr as, "one of my favourite philosophers." The interviewer, David

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[1] Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. William Benham, Kindle ed. (N.p.: Chump Change, 2016).

[2] In 1919, John Mecklin wrote of the first world war, "we must be honest with ourselves and say that the moral ideal cherished by Jesus and his immediate followers, an ideal in which, as we shall see, war had no place, cannot be considered binding upon the consciences of men under all conditions and in every age." John M. Mecklin, "The War and the Dilemma of the Christian Ethic," *American Journal of Theology* 23, no. 1 (1919): 14-40, JSTOR,15.

[3] Daniel Ott offers a clear summation of the opposing positions on pacifism in the 20th century, in particular Reinhold Neiburh and Stanley Haurewas. Daniel J. Ott, "Towards a Realistic, Public, Christian Pacifism," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 33, no. 3 (2012): 245-257, Gale Academic, 250f.

Brooks, asked, "What do you take away from him?" Demonstrating his familiarity with Niebuhr, Obama responded,

> I take away the compelling idea that there's serious evil in the world, and hardship and pain. And we should be humble and modest in our belief we can eliminate those things. But we shouldn't use that as an excuse for cynicism and inaction…..swinging from naive idealism to bitter realism. [4]

And here we see the common disconnect between Christology and reality. On the one hand our theology claims that God came willingly into the brutality of our humanity, which resulted in a scapegoat's death and the eventual vindication of resurrection. On the other hand, Christianity often rejects Jesus' voluntary engagement with, and exposing of, competition, rivalry and violence, by sacredly observing it as a lofty and unattainable vision of a future and divine kingdom.[5] Thus, having the "mind of Christ" is often perceived as ethereal rather than a practiced reality. So which is it?

The answer is glimpsed by considering that mimesis is not only the domain of disciples imitating God or Jesus. Mimesis emphasises that Jesus also imitated the Father; an imitation in love. Consequently, there is no mutual gain involved, which makes Christ's imitation unlike that which often ends in competition and rivalry. What then do followers of Jesus imitate if their desire is to be like God with Jesus as the mediator of that desire?

According to Girard, this question assumes that Christians cease all other human imitation, other than what they observe in Christ. In *I saw Satan Fall Like Lightning,*

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[4] David Brooks, "Obama, Gospel and Verse," *New York Times*, 26 April 2007. Accessed 2 December, 2020.

[5] John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 42-54.

Girard claims that Jesus did not end human imitation, rather Jesus invites his followers to imitate his imitation.[6] Jesus desire does not flow from himself. Girard correctly observes that Jesus never obeys his own (human) desire, instead his goal is to reveal the full image of God in himself; an image played out in the garden of Gethsemane and Jesus own words, "Not what I want, but what you want." (Mark 14:36). Consequently, Christians imitate Jesus' imitation of the Father.[7] In this regard, Jesus is our mediator of imitation itself. Because of his divine imitation, Jesus reveals the same loving and non-violent nature as the Father, thus disclosing the true nature of God. In doing so, Jesus imitation becomes the object of Christian desire; we see the fulness of our desire (*theosis*) in him.

All this leads to the conclusion that only Christ has the power to free us from our violent structures.[8] His human action of imitating the father without the need for personal gain provides a model of mimesis without the violence and opposition between equals.[9] Thus it can be said, that the natural consequence of conversion is the imitation of Christ's imitation.

> The Gospels and the New Testament…do not claim that humans must get rid of imitation; they recommend imitating the sole model who never runs the danger – if we really imitate the way children imitate – of being transformed into a fascinating rival.[10]

If Christian imitation is simply doing what Jesus did, as per the "What Would Jesus Do" (WWJD) movement, then Christianity is little more than hermeneutically inappropriate

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[6] René Girard, *I Saw Satan Fall Like Lightning*, trans. James G. Williams (New York: Orbis, 2001).

[7] Ibid, 13-14.

[8] Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 219.

[9] Ibid 400, 427.

[10] Ibid, 430.

copycatting.[11] To imitate Christ's imitation of the Father is to engage in a bigger theotic question that is more akin to WDJDWJD (why did Jesus do what Jesus did?). Though it is by no means as memorable, it is more palatable. *Theosis* is not copycatting, it is adaptive and differentiated transformation to the likeness of God in every setting. There are no rivals.

In Ephesians 2:14-16 the Apostle Paul writes,

> For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.

This passage is central to eucharistic liturgy within Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions. The Peace that is shared between congregants prior to the eucharist is premised on these words:

> Blessed be Christ the Prince of Peace: *who breaks down the walls that divide*.
>
> The peace of God be always with you. *Praise to Christ who unites us in peace.*[12]

In this moment the injunction of Jesus in Matthew 5:23-24 is exercised, even if only symbolically.

> So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

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[11] The phrase "What would Jesus do?" was popular in the United States in the later 1800s after the publication of Charles Sheldon's book, In His Steps: what would Jesus do? With the advent of the internet, the phrase found a global resurgence among youth groups in the 1990s.

[12] Church of the Province of New Zealand, *A New Zealand Prayer Book* (Glasgow: Collins, 1989), 485.

The specifics of the injunction are not that the worshipper must attend to their personal frustrations with someone else, but rather to proactively deescalate any conflict the other party may have with them.[13] However, the motivation is not to attain peace as a goal in itself, but rather to imitate the kenotic action of Jesus that was an imitation of the Fathers exceptional self-sacrificial love. Peace, as an end result, may or may not be achieved. What has been achieved, however, is the exercise of non-violent imitation such that the character of God is revealed within the disciple, and 'likeness' is restored.

This, then, is the end game of Christian leadership – the restoration of likeness by connecting people with Jesus life of imitating the Father; a life that continues through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, "whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you." (John 14:26). These words were offered to those having experienced the actual incarnation. As the book of Acts reveals, the earliest converts relied on the teaching of the apostles and those leading the fledgling churches (Acts 2:42). That being the case, what would imitating Jesus' imitation of the Father look like? In fact Girard's mimetic desire makes an appearance in 1 Corinthians 3 when the disciples look to various apostles as being their primary mediators of following Jesus.

> For as long as there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? For when one says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not merely human?
>
> What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything… (1 Corinthians 3:3-7)

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[13] Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Accordance electronic ed., Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33A (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 117.

As far as Paul is concerned he is only called to serve Christ as his redeemer. He is sufficiently differentiated to have no need for a following as a mediator of theotic desire. The true mediator of their *theosis* is always Jesus. Yet, Paul does not abdicate responsibility for those in his care. One chapter later, he offers a challenge to all who would read his words, "imitate me" (1 Cor 14:16). In this sense, he refers back to 1 Cor 3:11-12 where he writes:

> To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless, and we grow weary from the work of our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we speak kindly. We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day.

This imitation is not his likeness, but rather the path to it through the *kenosis* of emptying oneself of human power and privilege for the only life that matters. Paul's life becomes a pedagogical path.

Path - "Imitate Me"

As noted in chapter 5, there has been a growing interest in Girard's mimetic theory among leadership writers and teachers. However, the attention only extends to understanding how mimetic desire influences relationships within organisations and the need for leaders and managers to understand its presence and limit its negative effects on workplace culture. The previous Dean of the Melbourne Business school, Jennifer George, summed it well by writing, "leaders must have a clear ethical vision and be willing to reflect on and reform the morality of the culture and systems they lead." [14]

[14] Jennifer George. 2011. "The Demands of Ethical Leadership." Financial Times. Last modified 31 January, 2011, https://www.ft.com/content/09fd93a6-2580-11e0-8258-00144feab49a.

However, she did not express what that ethic behind the vision might be, only that an ethical leader ought to identify the dynamics of mimetic desire and scapegoating to thwart their negative effects. For George, leadership is about the management of mimetic effects, not eradicating them. Her assertion is telling, "Before they manage anything else, managers manage people (not least themselves)." [15] Colin Pink echoed the same thinking when he wrote that a leader, "has to make others desire what they desire," or at the very least channel the desire of others into a shared goal.[16] Ultimately Girard's thesis is limited to the psychology of management in order to avoid conflict and attain specified goals – it has become a tool by which a leader influences the concept of 'mediator' to achieve their own ends, or that of the organisation. There is no sense in the leadership literature that Girard's observations can be used for education, personal formation and community transformation. In contrast however, Christian leadership functions on a very different framework.

In 1 Corinthians 4:16 and 11:1 the Apostle Paul uses the singular phrase, μιμηταί μου (imitate me). While in 2 Thessalonians 3:7,9 he uses the plural phrase, μιμεῖσθαι ἡμᾶς (imitate us). The contexts in each case are quite different. In 1 Corinthians 4 Paul addresses the conflict between tribes of disciples following particular apostles. In creating cults of leadership under the mediation of those individual apostles, they became puffed up with a form of localised meritorious entitlement and status thus missing the point of true apostleship. As a result, the competition between these tribal disciples and their mediating apostles has resulted in the very rivalry Paul taught them to avoid through

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Colin Pink, "Leadership Through the Lens of Mimetic Desire," *The International Journal of Leadership in Public Services* 4, no. 2 (2008): 10-14, Reasearch Gate, 12,13.

humility and service (1 Cor 4:6). Such misappropriation of the teaching and example of the apostles undermined not only their local relationships, but the nature of the apostleship itself (1 Cor 4:8-13). Thus Paul encourages them: true understanding of the 'way together' is not gained through debate and status, but the imitation of voluntary limitation – the relinquishment of self in order to disclose our true identity in Christ (1 Cor 4:14-18). How they learn that is to imitate (v16) Pauls example as a 'father' among them (v15).

Again, in 1 Cor 11:1, Paul concludes a long section on eating food in connection with idols and the sensibilities between believers who disagree. At centre is the outworking of a person's freedoms gained in Christ. None of this is new to Paul in his own journey seen in 1 Cor 5. In 1 Cor 10, Paul reiterates that that everyone's freedom and fear is legitimate, yet there is an equal need for chosen corporate responsibility. As a leader, Paul's approach is kenotic. All have the same desire, *theosis* (to become like God). However, each sees the other as a hurdle to that desire, and conflict breaks out. Paul's, answer to the conflict? Do it all for the glory of God (10:31). But in order for such actions to glorify God they must be for the benefit of the other: "I try to [please] [17] everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved." (10:32). Given that the book of Acts records Paul spending 18 months in the Corinthian church (Acts 18:11), the force of his encouragement to "imitate me" (11:1) would not have been lost on them.

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[17] The greek, ἀρέσκω, commonly translated 'please' has a fuller sense of 'accomodation', or "to consult the pleasure of any one". William D Mounce and Rick D. Bennett, *Mounce Concise Greek-English Dictionary*, Accordance Electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Oaktree, 2011).

This premise of *theosis* by *kenosis* and learned through mimesis is a driving force in the writing of Paul. In the two instances above he refers to himself as the human exemplar of the kenotic path to Christlikeness. However, 2 Thessalonians 3:7, 9, Paul claims that the church should, "imitate us" (μιμεῖσθαι ἡμᾶς); the "us" being Paul, Timothy and Silas (according to Acts 17). In this case, the encouragement is to imitate their work of serving the church and not benefitting from it. The "man of lawlessness" (ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας, 2 Thess 2:3-4) to whom Paul refers, begins a passage regarding the Parousia and consequent divisions within the church.[18] St. Augustine in his City of God declared, "I admit that the meaning of this [passage] completely escapes me." [19] However, it is generally agreed that mayhem and confusion abounded in the church because of Jesus' delayed Parousia. Some had given up their faith, while others were so committed to the return of Christ they had given up their work and had become idle.[20] Likewise, the background reign of Roman emperors from Caligula to Nero, spread fear and uncertainty.[21] Into this uncertainty, Paul asks the Thessalonian church to observe such lawlessness as being the antithesis of the identity they have as followers of Christ. Idleness and fear are the markers of having already given way to the powers of selfishness (lawlessness). Rather, through prayer and the imitation of Paul, Silas and Timothy, who worked tirelessly for their benefit and without personal gain (something

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[18] David Ewert, "1-2 Thessalonians," in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible,* ed. Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Bookhouse, 1989), 1089-1092.

[19] A. Augustine, *The City of God*, ed. V. Bourke (New York: Image Books, 1958) Chapter 20

[20] Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief*, 334ff.

[21] F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Accordance electronic ed., Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 45 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), xxxiv.

they may have deserved in 2 Thess 3:9), they provided a Christlike imitation for the church and it's leaders to live by.[22] The end result of that model is a shared peace (3:16).

In each of the above mimetic encouragements of Paul, we see basic *theosis* at work – to become be like Christ. However, Paul notes that Christian *theosis* has been mired by varying self-motivated mediators. In Corinthians it was those who once imitated Paul and other apostles, but had since set themselves in competition to Paul. Consequently, Paul unmasks their true desire as self-interest, aggrandisement and personal gain, which though attractive, are the opposite of seeking "the good of many," and a hurdle to the many being saved (1 Cor 11:33).

For Paul, the end game of leadership is transformation of people in to the likeness of God through Jesus. It is through Jesus' imitation of the Father that we discover peace with God, peace with one another and our identity as children made in the image of God. Paul, like all Christians leaders, is not the mediator of that desire. Rather, by imitating Christ's *kenosis*, Paul reveals Christ. In emptying himself of the human desire for self-gain he reveals his true "in Christ" self. By encouraging others to imitate his path, his hope is they discover their true selves in Christ too.

If Gornoski and Besler are correct that, "Human beings desire what their mimetic role models desire, therefore, healthy company cultures start with great leadership…" [23] it follows that Christian leaders 'desire' for *theosis* is the basis for proper discipleship. For

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[22] John W. Bailey and James W. Clarke, "II Thessalonians," in *The Interpreters Bible,* ed. Nolan B. Harmon, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1955), 335-339.

[23] David Gornoski and Lenora J. Bresler. "The Key to Move From Imitation to Differentiation: How Mimetic Theory Unlocks the Workplace." HR Florida Review. Last modified 12 March, 2018, https://hrfloridareview.org/magazine/magazine-archives/item/683-the-key-to-move-from-imitation-to-differentiation-how-mimetic-theory-unlocks-the-workplace.

Paul, leaders are not the mediators of the desire to become like Christ, but rather illustrative paths.

Thus, just as Jesus moved freely among divisive social, religious and political groups, Paul was able to do the same. In 1982 James Dunn popularised the title, "New Perspectives on Paul,"[24] which he attributed it to the Anglican New Testament scholar, N.T Wright.[25] This was important work because it reshaped not only New Testament studies but theology itself. For the first time we were able to see Paul not just grappling with theology for the sake of dogmatics, but rather theology as the out-working of human/divine experience in the context of identity-political issues.[26]

In part, Paul's grappling with the inclusion of the Gentile community was a mirror of his own identity shift from being a Pharisee and persecutor of a fledgling church, to an Apostle of Christ.[27] Though the Acts account of his conversion and ministry is reasonably detailed, the text telescopes time making it seem as if this transition was quick (Acts 9:1-31). Yet, Galatians 1 and 2 recount some of Paul's post-conversion activities before his public ministry and those chapters suggest a period of some fourteen years of maturation in the "new way." As Hans Kung points out, those years of transition were filled with mistrust from three different quarters: Paul was an Apostate to the Jews, a murderer to

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[24] James D.G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul* (London: Eerdmans Publishing, 2007).

[25] Nicholas Thomas Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (N.p.: SPCK Publishing, 2009).

[26] Hans Kung, *Christianity - Essence, History and Future* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 111f.

[27] Jennifer Slater, *Christian Identity Characteristics in Paul's Letter to the Members of the Jesus Movement in Galatians: Creating Diastratic Unity in a Diastratic Divergent South African Society* (United Kingdom: AuthorHouse, 2012). 74.

Jewish Christians and unknown to Gentile believers.[28] The Paul who emerged from those years of identity conflict and transition was uniquely placed to communicate across the schismatic boundaries of the new Judeo-Christian community. In doing so, Paul was imitating Christ's desire to become like God, letting go of his own desires for the benefit of the other. His encouragement to the Philippian church, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus…" (Phil 2:5) is echoed in his comment to the Galatians church, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20).

If the ultimate goal of Christian leadership is the likeness of God through the imitation of Christ imitating the Father, then leadership is the provision of a pedagogical path to that end. There is no other fundamental goal.

Freedom

We live in a time when society calls for the individual freedom of expression, and freedom to believe. This freedom is itself a desire, which is always mediated. In our modern context, that mediation is through identity political groups and those who represent them. However, if freedom is mediated and rivalrous, then the freedom hoped for is actually the "enslavement of the innermost spiritual freedom of man."[29] The eighth century prophets deliberated at great length on Israel's determination to mimic the power

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[28] Kung, *Christianity - Essence, History and Future*, 113.

[29] Raymond Schwager proves an excellent aticulation of the connection between memesis and freedom from the perspective of the bible and psychology. Raymond Schwager, "Mimesis and Freedom," *Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 21, (2014): 29-46, JSTOR, 39.

of the surrounding nations as if this would bring them the freedom in prosperity and the authority they hoped for (Micah 1:3;5:9 cf Zech 9:10).[30] Yet, as Hosea warned, if Israel runs after Assyria and Egypt, she will be captured like a bird in flight (Hosea 7:11ff). "The very people whose way of life they (the unfaithful Jews) envied, whom they sought to resemble in everything, proved to be their enemies and executioners" (2 Macc. 4:16). This highlights the confusion that exists around forms of freedom and the nature of desire itself. In fact this confusion finds its origin in the third chapter of Genesis. The woman hears a voice declaring that that God is hiding something from them, a freedom beyond their current power to experience or know. In commanding humans not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God becomes the knower who jealously embargoes such knowledge. Thus the desire is set, there is another freedom God has. The rivalry unfolds, the apple is eaten and the tension between freedoms that God foreknew came to pass, "on the day you eat it our eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:5). In that moment freedom became the art of juggling the twin hand grenades of good and evil – the conflict between personal desire and human responsibility.[31] And here we come to the heart of individual freedom, the agency to choose.

Christian leadership is not about the alignment of religious desires in the avoidance of conflict, or the achievement of a specific goal. It is about *theosis*. Leadership both teaches and reveals the source of that theotic desire as the imitation of Christ's imitation of the father. Christian freedom is the choice to desire likeness, because

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[30] Ibid, 32.

[31] See Girard's section on Love and Knowledge. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 276ff.

in that likeness rests the power of *kenosis* to become a kingdom person like Jesus. It is a desire that ultimately sets people free among all other people because there is no rivalrous fear. It is the freedom to sacrificially belong to a community while being differentiated from it. This freedom is relinquishment to the holy. The spiritual writer, Robert Wick writes, "Our journey with God can be made much more simple if only we take the time and effort each day to remember that true ordinariness is indeed tangible holiness." [32] The more ordinary we become, the less we require from others to bolster our ego needs. We are at ease with God and ourselves. It means we are able to be among all people. Such freedom is to be fully present in our life because we are not threatened by the 'other'. As Simon Walker puts it, it is the undefended and differentiated leader that has the capacity to ask the difficult questions and make observations that others choose not to. They act according to what is right rather than the expedient or popular. Walker writes:

> Leadership has little to do with making lots of decisions, with getting a great deal done. It is about getting the right things done. As leaders, the crucial quality we need is the courage to stop. The courage to wait and be still. While everyone around is clamouring for a decision, the leader waits until she is confident and clear.[33]

Both Friedman and Walker unpack a pastoral, psychological and practical view of what is often referred to as 'servant leadership'. However, they offer the reminder that a Christian 'servant' is not a doormat nor dim-witted. A servant leader is, in fact, free because they know who they are 'among' others as opposed to having their identity needs met through them. This kind of freedom offers integrity, clarity and honesty – they are

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[32] Robert J. Wicks, *Riding the Dragon: 10 Lessons for Inner Strength in Challenging Times* (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2003), 109.

[33] Simon Walker, *Leading Out of Who You Are: Discovering the Secret of Undefended Leadership*, Kindle ed., Book 1 of the Undefended Leader Trilogy (Carlisle, UK: Piquant Editions, 2007), chapter 12.

without fear, because they know how desire works and precisely what their *theosis* is. Somewhat counterintuitively Friedman writes, "A society cannot evolve, no matter how much freedom is guaranteed, when the citizenry is more focused on one another than on their own beliefs and values." [34] As with Girard, he is making the point that our desire for freedom must have the central nervous system of a belief in order for it to provide any kind of self-determination that understands the tension between the good and evil of its actions.[35]

Christian leadership offers and teaches 'likeness' as the beginning and end of Christian desire. God works within us as unique and sovereign individuals, but individual desire has the same end. Again, leadership provides a path to that likeness in complex times. When laity are lost and confused as to their surroundings, leaders offer the light of their own imitation of God toward that likeness, in all its messiness. Paul's "imitate me" offers that challenge across the millennia. Finally, Leadership reveals freedom in action. The freedom of knowing oneself despite the crowd, yet living at ease with the crowd. Their desired *theosis* is the hermeneutical guide through any complex social maize.

Through the incarnation, we see God willingly step into the role of scapegoat. Certainly the Cross is the ultimate fulfilment of scapegoat violence, however its presence is consistent throughout Jesus ministry too. As the Lord spends intimate time among pharisees, tax collectors, Samaritans, the cursed and the sinner, he manages to

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[34] Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, chapter 2.

[35] Ibid, chapter 4. Simon Walker agrees writing, "Leadership, like acting on Broadway or jumping in an Olympic final, is a threatening activity, one in which we may be observed and evaluated by a host of critics. As long as we fear the reaction of this audience, we can't be free in our leadership. Freedom comes when we are concerned only about the opinion of the one in the audience who truly matters." Walker, *Leading Out of Who You Are: Discovering the Secret of Undefended Leadership*, chapter 11.

simultaneously annoy all the identity groups of his day, much the chagrin of his followers. Consequently, at the foot of the cross, the jeering crowd consisted of all who experience the divine presence at some point in Jesus ministry. So what does Christian leadership look like? It is a leader who will sit and fellowship at all the identity tables of life, and do so because they are not owned by anyone except Christ. They choose not to be defined by a group. Christian leaders consent to being scapegoated, even by other Christian believers, because that is indeed the way of Christ and is the cross to be borne if peace is ever to be born (Ephesians 2:14). Canon Andrew White, also known as the Vicar of Baghdad, wrote of his experience attempting to make peace among warring groups in the Middle East. Despite being loved and loathed among different groups around the world, his understanding is clear, you cannot make peace unless you speak and eat with your enemy.[36] It is this willingness to cross the aisle to another group (cultural, religious, social, political, sexual) that makes peace possible, and in doing so exposes the evils of scapegoating as an expression of violence from unredeemed desires. Christian leaders must talk, eat and share in some small way the lives of those whose identities are defined by Left and Right politics, the LGBTQIA groups, gender interests, environmental concerns, other religions, or those who just consider themselves 'other.' As terrifying and challenging as it may seem, it is the ministry Jesus offered in his imitation of the Father; it is the basis of discipleship. The caveat? Such leaders will be scapegoated – until the Kingdom of God is fully established.

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[36] Andrew White, *The Vicar of Baghdad: Fighting for Peace in the Middle East* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2011).

CONCLUSION

Pulling it all together

In trying the address the complexity of Christian leadership and identity politics, I came to realise I had chosen a large topic, possibly too large for the space available. In fact the dissertation could easily be split in two pieces of research. The first may have been titled, *A Critical Diagnostic Survey of Leadership Responses to a Postmodern Era,* while the second might have been, *The Foundations of Christian Leadership: Mimetics and Cruciformity.* However, while more could have been explored at a deeper level, for my purposes splitting them may have left them as academic orphans. Fortunately, the Doctor of Ministry programme allows for a broader approach to the chosen topic allowing the two parts to be understood as informing one-another, and that has certainly been the case personally. Consideration of leadership problems in chapter one and how they came into being, provided the framework to consider an alternative basis for leadership thinking that may serve to address the problem. Inasmuch as part one was illuminating, disturbing and instructive, part two was more complex. The material provided by René Girard is, at one level, rather simple because it is not only insightful, it is also readily observable. However, the implications theologically are more complex and divisive and hence need further exploration, but that of course is the principle sign of something profound. As Robert Barron, auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, wrote in response to Girard's death in 2015, "There are

some thinkers that offer intriguing ideas and proposals, and there is a tiny handful of thinkers that manage to shake your world. Girard was in this second camp".[1]

Again, though I attempted to locate the influence of identity politics on Christian leadership within a New Zealand context, it became apparent that equal influences from both sides of the Atlantic were impossible to ignore. Indeed most the of the critical writing on the subject is not only limited in scope, but is found overseas. Where it is based in New Zealand, it focuses more on the conflicts and interactions between Māori and the British Crown, human sexuality and gender. Until very recently there has been very little mention of its implications to Christian leadership or leadership in general. So to some extend I have been exploring a new wilderness without much of a map. Yet, there is plenty of material that can be used as an early guide.

As shown in part one, the rise of identity politics on the coattails of postmodernism revealed the incapacity of New Zealand Christian leadership to adapt to the social and political changes outside the control of the established church. Religious institutions that once held a degree of control over social and moral thinking were being outpaced by a new philosophical worldview that spoke more clearly to a changing world. More importantly it spoke to a church ill equipped to thoughtfully engage with its broader missional context without retiring to the defensive position of doctrinal protectionism or a more populist unreflective pragmatism. Moreover, neither of these responses were simple binary constructs, rather they remain multifaceted denominationally, politically and

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[1] Robert Barron. "René Girard, Church Father." Word on Fire. Last modified 10 November, 2015, https://www.wordonfire.org/resources/article/rene-girard-church-father/4982/.

theologically. Yet, despite these inner complexities, the basic foundations of doctrinal protection or missional pragmatism resulted in Christian communities mirroring the identity political world they often rail against. Personal Christian identity and value is now framed by the Christian community and leadership to which a person belongs. In the same way that the political Right adopted the power of Left-wing identity politics in the 1990s, it seems the church of the 21st century has done the same theologically and politically.[2] In 2002, Robert Webber published the popular book, *The Younger Evangelicals,* in which he observed a new breed of emerging leadership that was less concerned about being right and more concerned about missional context and engagement. They would, however, remain conservative.[3] Webber accurately highlighted four important areas of Christian leadership for a coming era: (1) a missiological understanding of the church, (2) theological reflection, (3) spiritual formation, (4) cultural awareness. Held together, these four components would be the basis of a "New Kind of Leadership for the Twenty-First Century".[4] However, in highlighting the word 'conservative', Webber could not have foreseen the impending politicisation of Christian

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[2] John MacArthur is followed closely by evangelicals (pentecostal and conservative) throughout New Zealand and has influenced them politically. MacArthur recently asserted that true Christians cannot vote Democrat in the recent presidential election. See, Reformed Christian Teaching. "Christians Cannot and Must Not Vote Democrat - John Macarthur." Last modified 25 August, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=icGev5bJnRg.

Likewise, as the Corona Virus pandemic raged across America, the same pastor declared, "there is no pandemic", causing followers to breach community and state health rules in the exercise of their faith. See, Yonat Shimron. "John Macarthur Claimed There is 'No Pandemic.'." Religion News Service. Last modified 1 September, 2020, https://religionnews.com/2020/09/01/john-macarthur-claimed-there-no-pandemic-he-was-politicizing-the-science/.

[3] Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002; reprint, 2nd), 239f.

[4] Ibid, 240.

community, theology and identity that consequently rendered his forecast little more than a conservative identity-political manifesto for the twentieth century. Jennifer Berger and Keith Johnston's excellent book, *Simple Habits for Complex Times: Powerful Practices for Leaders,* provided useful observations about the complex reality leaders operate in.[5] However, the problem for Christian leaders resides in the title of the book itself, as the phrase 'Powerful Practices' hints at yet another pragmatic adaptation to changing circumstances.

As a result, the dissertation wishes to suggest a better epistemological map for leadership amidst change and uncertainty; a map that includes critical reflection on (1) the recent history of leadership practice and response, (2) a curiosity surrounding current social thinking, (3) a better understanding of why people choose to follow leaders, and (4) a reflective and reflexive cruciform theology of outcomes and practice.[6] None of this is a critique of specific leadership/management models, but rather the foundations upon which management models may be chosen. In this sense, Christian leaders are driven by a more profound sense of purpose and awareness than mere contextual populism.

During the first weeks of the doctoral programme, the lead supervisor, Dr Jason Clark, urged 'curiosity' as the basis of reading and research. Without curiosity, we are condemned to the circular life of protecting what is. 2020 has been the year of

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[5] Berger and Johnston, *Simple Habits for Complex Times: Powerful Practices for Leaders*.

[6] Reflection is the insight to notice things retrospectively that result in a new insight because particular details were missed in beforehand. Reflection and repentance often go hand in hand as repentance is ultimately to 'see differently'. Reflexivity happens in real time. It queries our own attitudes, ways of thinking, values, presuppostions and biases, to more fully comprehend our leadership in relation to others in each context.

misinformation on multiple fronts, whether it President Trump, election fraud, Brexit, COVID 19, environmental concerns, and the news media itself. Many internet news outlets literally spew unintelligible mistruths based on diverse opinions, while more mainline media inform their base adherents what they want to hear in carefully manicured form, yet all have one thing in common: they believe the others are wrong.[7] Add to this the proliferation of Christian internet channels through which Christian identity-groups provide meaning to lost souls by scapegoating other groups as tangible enemies, and our increasing divisions (religious and secular) escalate.

In contrast, curious research urges us to think outside the known and to precariously consider alternative paths. To that end this dissertation is an attempt to do so. As a consequence I am exploring a new leadership dynamics course for 2022, which will continue evolving with the input of other leaders and educators. The programme will steer away from both partisan and pragmatic responses to unsettling change, encouraging fledgling leaders to think about how they think about Christian leadership using the outline of this dissertation itself. The programme will likely run over four days as follows:

Day one: The history of leadership practice as a response to change (decline, identity-politics, pragmatism and partisanship). Critiquing the past is not to condemn it, but to learn from it. The twentieth century posed more challenges to the global church than at any time in history. The Māori proverb, Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua: 'I

[7] See the well written essay by Richard Gray. "Lies, Propaganda and Fake News: A Challenge for Our Age." BBC. Last modified 2 March, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20170301-lies-propaganda-and-fake-news-a-grand-challenge-of-our-age.

walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on my past' acts as a guide to the way we think about our leadership in the present and the future. The past comes with us one way or another. What will we learn?

Day Two: The influence of fear: politics, culture, economics and power. We live in and are affected by our wider world. Jesus taught of the Kingdom of God that is already here, among and within. Jesus engagement with all people was not about courage or fearlessness in danger, it was about knowing himself. The ministry of Jesus (and later the apostles) did not encompass partisan populism nor pragmatism and were thus capable of living and engaging with all forms of culture, power, wealth and politics – they were differentiated. Fear drives wedges between people and groups, gospel love is contrary to such segregation.

Day three: Christian Leadership, violence and scapegoating (Mimetic theory and its implications on leadership) A study of René Girard's thesis in practice. Why do people follow leaders? Why do leaders mimic other leaders? Understanding the nature of desire and it's orientation toward competition, violence and scapegoating. This section deals honestly with hostility; the hostility we experience or deliver to others. Mimetic theory is at the heart of identity politics because it states clearly how desires bring people together and at the same time force people apart. It exposes how our peace (that we often celebrate when achieved) is often established through harming others. When leaders understand this, they have a better self-understanding and fuller comprehension of why people choose to follow them and the conflicts that invariable come to pass.

Day Four: The end game and why? (Cruciform leadership: Theosis and Kenosis) What is the primary goal of Christian leadership? Theosis is the ancient desire to become like God – to restore our likeness. What does that mean in different contexts, individually and corporately? If theosis is the goal, then kenosis becomes the mechanism, it is the how. Christian leaders are exemplars of theosis and kenosis such that they can say, 'imitate me'. It is perhaps the most terrifying and challenging aspect of leadership. However, theosis and kenosis are not about achievement or success, they are visible experiences of grace in the fullness of life's failures, tragedies and celebrations.

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