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### Spiritual Conversations

Randall D. Groves

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS

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

BY  
RANDALL D. GROVES

NEWBERG, OREGON

APRIL 2008

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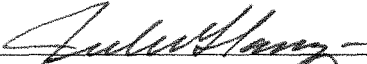
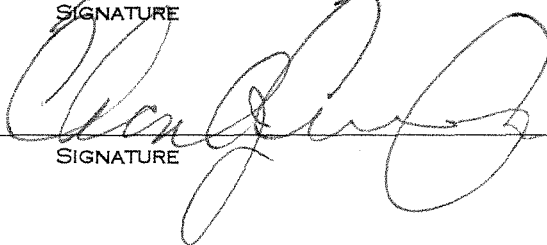
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## ABSTRACT

Title: SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS

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How can the Keesler Air Force Base Chapel provide spiritual care for airmen who are spiritual but who are not religious? The Department of Defense challenges the chapel to promote the spiritual health of all airmen while the chapel mostly provides religion-based services. The chapel's efforts, therefore, ignore airmen who do not fit into a particular religion. The problem will be addressed by suggesting that the chapel incorporate a spiritual conversations gathering into the existing religion-based services. The chapel needs to embrace spiritual-but-not-religious airmen by offering a spiritual conversations gathering and conducting an annual spirituality survey.

The purpose of this dissertation is to provide an understanding of how to respond to postmodern spirituality and to help motivate Christian chaplains to view themselves as missionaries so that they embrace the spiritual-but-not-religious students. Accomplishing a spirituality survey and leading a spiritual conversations gathering are the primary ways to embrace the spiritual-but-not-religious students. Such efforts may uncover new forms



of spiritual care that, if implemented, will motivate airmen to turn toward the chapel for their spiritual care.

Chapter 1 describes the problem and claim, illustrates the problem with a narrative, and presents contextual factors such as demographics, structure, timelines, and symbols. Chapter 2 describes the spiritual-but-not-religious student airmen, influenced by postmodern culture. Based on a 2007 student spirituality survey, spiritual-but-not-religious airmen are not interested in chapel participation. Chapter 3 reveals that the chapel's spiritual care efforts are funneled solely through traditional religious programs, ignoring those who are spiritual-but-not-religious. Chapter 4 provides biblical guidance for a spiritual conversations gathering. Chapter 5 briefly outlines a history of the church's adaptation to culture. Chapter 6, the concluding chapter, suggests that a spiritual conversations gathering is a way to adapt to the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Narrative**

Airman Jones, along with 150 other airmen, arrived at Keesler Air Force Base from Basic Military Training. He and his classmates joined a community of over 3,000 students to receive initial technical training. All 151 airmen enlisted in the Air Force shortly after high school graduation. Although excited about this next step in Air Force training, some students were filled with grief from the death of a friend.

In Basic Military Training, eleven airmen became friends with Airman Smith who experienced a series of misfortunes including flunking a test, failing a room inspection, showing up late for duty twice, and smoking. The internal stress mounted, but Airman Smith hid it well. Everyone in the program experienced stress, so no one thought that Airman Smith's stress was any worse than their own stress until he committed suicide.

Airman Smith's eleven friends began talking about spiritual things after the funeral. What is the meaning and purpose of life? Where could they find comfort and answers? What or who is the Presence some of them are sensing? Does no one else care that the Air Force barely acknowledged Airman Smith's death? The Air Force quickly filled his classroom chair with another young airman. Training continued without interruption and the experience left Airman Smith's friends feeling like tiny cogs among

360,000 other cogs in a huge killing machine. The cold and demanding Air Force stood in contrast to an unnamed, caring spiritual Presence. What was this Presence?

Everything about life in the Air Force was regulated, measured, analyzed, and judged. The Air Force made the airmen feel like fish in a fishbowl. The Air Force took away many freedoms during training, but not freedom of religion. The Constitution guaranteed it, so the airmen took advantage and attended all four of the chapel's Christian worship services. They wanted answers to their spiritual questions.

The airmen attended a chapel service and talked about their experience. The differences between the chapel and their home churches made some of them uncomfortable. The chaplain used unfamiliar terminology, one student innocently sat in someone else's seat and was asked to move, some did not understand the meaning behind the grape juice and bread, the Bible and music were unfamiliar, and the chapel experience created more questions than answers and left them feeling alienated.

The eleven airmen attended another Christian worship service at the chapel and found the service confusing and embarrassing and the communion rituals foreign. They tried a third worship service where everyone seemed excited, happy, and full of confidence. It felt superficial. Another worship service was formal, stiff, and lifeless. No one welcomed them or visited with them afterwards. During a lunch conversation, the airmen expressed frustration that they had tried all four Christian worship services offered by the chapel, and did not feel they fit. One airman said, "The Air Force expects me to conform in so many ways. Does my spirituality have to conform to a religion before someone accepts and understands me?"

The death of Airman Smith sensitized the eleven friends to their need for spiritual guidance. The chapel's Christian worship services did not provide any help, so they turned to the chaplains. Three airmen visited with an older chaplain, thinking that she would understand their quest. She quickly offered a solution, "Your problem is that you need to ask Jesus to come into your life and then start attending chapel." Two other airmen visited with another chaplain who took the time to listen and understand them. They were so impressed that they made another appointment only to discover that the chaplain was deployed for the next six months.

After leaving technical training at Keesler, the eleven airmen dispersed into the Air Force. A few of them continued exploring their spirituality on their own, but no one could walk with them on their spiritual journey. The chaplains were nice but each tried to convert the airmen to his or her religion. The suicide awakened the eleven airmen to the importance of their own spiritual health, but they never found what they needed. All they found were religions with no place to belong.

### **Contextual Factors**

The fictitious story illustrates the religious forms of spirituality the chapel provides. The story demonstrates the problem: the Keesler chapel offers little spiritual care for spiritual-but-not-religious student airmen. The chapel needs to embrace spiritual-but-not-religious airmen by offering a spiritual conversations gathering and conducting an annual spirituality survey.

The spiritual conversation gathering is comprised of spiritual-but-not-religious airmen and a chaplain. The group gathers to discuss the airmen's spirituality rather than the chaplain's religion. Airmen who do not feel they fit into any religious category, are searching for a spiritual identity or growth, or who want to enhance their spiritual wellness outside of an organized religion attend the gathering. The spiritual conversations gathering is a mission field which requires the chaplain to engage the airmen as a missionary and use biblical and historical perspectives to guide the conversation.

The student spirituality survey identifies and provides dialogue opportunities with spiritual-but-not-religious airmen. Air Force chapels offer spiritual care in religious forms while postmodern culture is more interested in spirituality than in organized religion. A student spirituality survey presents new forms of spiritual care which, if implemented by the chapel, can motivate students to seek spiritual wellness through the chapel.

The religious chapel and the spiritual student airmen are on parallel journeys. While postmodern culture influences airmen to be spiritual outside of religious categories, the chapel remains exclusively religious in its approach, creating barriers to spiritual care. A spiritual conversations gathering and an annual spirituality survey can provide an intersection between the two parallel journeys and allow spiritual-but-not-religious airmen access to spiritual care. Spiritual health will increase and give the Christian chaplain an opportunity to light an airman's path to Jesus.

## Demographic Assessment

Each year Keesler Air Force Base provides technical training to over 20,000 airmen. At any given time over 3,000 airmen are preparing for a new Air Force career at the base. Training consists of a highly structured schedule of classroom instruction and evaluation, physical fitness training, marching practice, and military life indoctrination. The program has many rules to follow and the consequences for breaking those rules can be severe. The airmen at Keesler AFB experience tremendous pressure to perform physically and academically, and chaplains provide spiritual care in the midst of a highly structured military and academic environment.

Many of Keesler's airmen are separated from their families for the first time, and some of the airmen who do not know how to handle freedom from parental supervision break the rules while others feel imprisoned and homesick. Forced separation from family creates the need for everyone to form new relationships within an Air Force family.

Student airmen are fresh from basic training. Many students enlisted soon after high school graduation and present the same immaturity issues expected from teenagers. Military Training Leaders (MTLs) are assigned to students. The MTLs are part parent, part instructor, and part evaluator. They work in the dorms where students live and supervise students when they are not in class.

The airmen come from diverse cultures, religions, and places, and each airman brings a unique spiritual experience to Keesler. Fewer than 7 percent of the airmen attend Christian worship at the chapel while 83 percent claim some version of Christianity on

their dog tags.<sup>1</sup> Informal surveys by show of hands of arriving students indicate that up to 15 percent claim no religious affiliation, but express interest in spirituality.

### Structural Analysis

Hierarchy dominates the structure. The Department of Defense policy and Air Force instructions govern every activity. Commanders implement the policy and instructions through the chain of command, and students are at the very bottom of the chain.

The structure is task oriented and designed to accomplish a mission. The mission is to provide well-trained airmen for the operational Air Force. Airmen who do well are rewarded with graduation, and airmen who do not perform well are discharged and return home. Students are under great pressure to perform.

Someone is always watching the students. Instructors monitor the students in class and MTLs take charge when students return to the dorms. MTLs regularly inspect the airman's uniform, grooming, and dorm room. Students are rewarded if they pass inspection and punished if they do not. Privacy is rare and precious.

The chapel shares this hierarchical command structure. The Wing Chaplain is the benevolent commander of all chaplain activities and personnel. He or she is directly responsible to the Wing Commander who is in charge of the entire base. The training branch of the chapel provides for the spiritual and religious needs of Keesler's student

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<sup>1</sup> Religious preference information was provided by the Military Personnel Flight in September 2006. Chapel attendance figures were obtained from September 2006 chapel attendance reports.

population. The community branch provides for the permanent party population's spiritual and religious needs.

Pluralism abounds and the chapel offers a wide variety of Christian worship services including a Traditional Protestant worship service, a Contemporary Protestant worship service, a Gospel Protestant worship service, Catholic Mass, and a Later Day Saints gathering. Muslims gather on Fridays at the chapel's Islamic Center. Wiccans gather on Saturdays at the Fishbowl. The Traditional Protestant worship service is very similar to Webber's Traditional Worship style, while the Contemporary Protestant worship service is very similar to Webber's pragmatic style.<sup>2</sup> The chapel does not offer a service similar to Webber's Young Evangelicals style.<sup>3</sup> The religious needs of Buddhist, Jewish, and Hindu students are met in civilian places of worship.

The chapel provides a Protestant Sunday School, Catholic Confirmation classes, and several chaplain-led Christian Bible studies. All religious education efforts are designed for mature Christians. Less than 2 percent of the student population participates in the chapel's religious education programs.

The chapel provides pastoral care through chaplain counseling, workplace and dorm visitation, and ministry of presence wherever people gather. Chaplains are ordained and endorsed by their respective religious group and seminary educated. Chaplains must be comfortable serving in a religiously pluralistic setting.

### Symbols

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 201.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 201.



The chapel is part of the Triangle, a three-sided arrangement of thirteen buildings. The Triangle includes six dormitories, the chapel, the chapel's educational annex, two dining facilities, the theater, the pool, and the Fishbowl. The Fishbowl is located on the ground floor of the Levitow Training Facility, which is a short walk from any location in the Triangle. The Fishbowl is a symbol of hospitality and a proximity space<sup>4</sup> sponsored by the chapel. Hundreds of students flow in and out of the Fishbowl each day to study, watch movies, visit with the chaplains, play games, eat popcorn and cookies, or relax. Every Saturday the Fishbowl hosts organized fun events for students.

The Fishbowl houses a kitchen, post office, internet workstations, phone booths, a large briefing area, several meeting rooms, and a lounge area. Four chaplains and three chaplain assistants work in the Fishbowl. Games, DVD players with big-screen TVs, and free snacks are scattered throughout.

Chapel buildings symbolize the Constitution's guarantee of religious freedom. Any religion is free to utilize the chapel for worship and religious education. The sanctuary must be kept in a neutral state and free of all religions symbols when it is not in use. The neutrality of the chapel sanctuary symbolizes the pluralistic context of military culture.

The military uniform symbolizes conformity and submission. Every uniform displays rank, which symbolizes where the airman fits in the chain of command. The name tag displays identity and the occupational badge announces the airman's function. A cross, for example, serves as the occupational badge for the Christian chaplain.

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 24-25.

### Historical Timeline

Student training lasts between four weeks and eight months, depending on the career field. Each new student spends no less than twenty-five hours in the Fishbowl receiving in-processing briefings during their first week. Chaplains are purposely visible during the first week serving snacks, forming relationships, answering questions, and expressing hospitality. Students move to their first operational Air Force base and put their training into practice after graduation.

Chaplains are stationed at Keesler AFB between two and four years. Chaplains are assigned to work in the Fishbowl between six months and three years. Chaplains may deploy a total of six to twelve months during an assignment to Keesler. The student population and the chapel staff are constantly rotating. Constant rotation presents barriers for long-term relationships.

The chapel conducts an annual spiritual needs survey among those who attend chapel. The survey is part of a required process that seeks to balance needs with resources. Few outside the chapel are surveyed, and until 2007 there has never been a survey targeting spiritual-but-not-religious students.

### Problem and Claim

Church attendance in Western culture is declining,<sup>5</sup> and Air Force chapels share in that decline. Between 10 and 15 percent of all active duty military personnel attend

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<sup>5</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh, *Reaching a New Generation: Strategies for Tomorrow's Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 45.

chapel or a local church at least once per month.<sup>6</sup> The Air Force chaplaincy's core documents charge the local chapel to promote a vibrant, spiritually healthy Air Force. Poor worship attendance numbers may indicate that the chapel is not providing inclusive spiritual care and needs to find alternative approaches.

The Air Force Chaplain Service exists to serve the needs of all airmen including those who are not religious. Christian chaplains need to take a missional approach to ministry by engaging students who are spiritual, but not religious. A missional effort may lead such students to establish a relationship with Jesus and follow Him. The Great Commission lays responsibility on the Christian chaplain to engage students who are not attracted to the chapel's religious worship and education.

Postmodern culture, with its emphasis on diversity and pluralism, impacts declining chapel attendance by increasing interest in spirituality while decreasing interest in organized religion.<sup>7</sup> A student spirituality survey, conducted in the Fishbowl in 2007, revealed that a significant number of student airmen are interested in spirituality but not in religion. The chapel may not capture the interest of spiritual-but-not-religious airmen as long as it provides spiritual care solely through religious forms such as religious worship and religious education. The chapel does not meet the spiritual needs of such airmen which may diminish their spiritual health.

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<sup>6</sup> Donald W. Hadley, *Ministry with the Military: A Guide for Churches and Chaplains* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992), 3.

<sup>7</sup> David Hay and Kate Hunt, *Understanding the Spirituality of People Who Don't Go to Church: A Report on the Findings of the Adult's Spirituality Project at the University of Nottingham* (Nottingham, UK: University of Nottingham, 2000), 13.

Chapters 2 through 6 serve as a resource for missional Christian chaplains who seek an understanding of postmodern culture's impact on the spirituality of airmen. An understanding can enable the chaplain to adapt to postmodern culture's influence, making ministry more effective. A spiritual conversations gathering for spiritual-but-not-religious airmen and an annual student spirituality survey are the best ways to adapt to the cultural context.

### **Chapter Structure**

Chapter 2 describes the impact of postmodern culture on Keesler's student airmen. Postmodern cultural has elevated interest in spirituality and decreased interest in organized religion. A student spirituality survey found that a significant number of airmen are interested in spiritual wellness but do not look to the chapel for their spiritual care. The chapel's religious approach to spirituality isolates such airmen.

Chapter 3 describes the Keesler AFB chapel. Traditional religions shape the chapel's spiritual care efforts more than the spirituality of Keesler's airmen. The chapel's current worship, religious education, and pastoral care efforts target those who fit into a traditional religion and alienate those who do not fit. A spiritual conversations gathering meets the needs of Keesler's spiritual-but-not-religious airmen and therefore enhances the chapel's ability to fulfill its mission to provide a spiritually healthy Air Force.

Chapter 4 describes how Jesus incarnated into His pluralistic context. Jesus is the model for the Christian chaplain who seeks to be missional. He became a human without losing His identity. As He engaged people, Jesus moved freely across the border between

individual spirituality and organized religion. He spoke in religious terms to those who fit into the religion of His day. He spoke in spiritual terms to those who did not fit. Jesus adapted to a pluralistic culture through the Incarnation and embraced people within His culture through conversation. Jesus equipped His disciples and commanded them to go everywhere so that His incarnation would continue. Chapter 2 provides biblical guidance for a spiritual conversations gathering.

Chapter 5 provides a brief history of the church's adaptation to culture. Christian chaplains need to adapt to their culture just as Christian missionaries do. Adapting to an indigenous culture is a normative practice for missionaries. The Christian chaplain must move from the center of religion to the margins of culture to enable incarnation. The use of pneumatological language may aid the move toward the spiritual-but-not-religious airman. The Christian chaplain who stays in the center of religion ignores not only those at the margins, but also the Great Commission.

Chapter 6 describes a spiritual conversations gathering and an annual spirituality survey. Conversations begin relationships and relationships transform people. An ongoing spiritual conversations gathering will create relationships among students who feel isolated. Students who participate in the gathering may give the chaplain permission to support and guide their spiritual journey. Providing support and guidance will move the chapel one step closer to fulfilling its calling to promote spiritually healthy airmen.

Leading such a gathering will present an opportunity for the Christian chaplain to influence spiritual-but-not-religious students to begin following Jesus. Students may ask

the Christian chaplain about Christianity, which will move the Christian chaplain one step closer to fulfilling their calling to be a missionary in uniform.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE SPIRITUAL-BUT-NOT-RELIGIOUS AIRMAN

Spirituality is Hot, Religion is Not.

—Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*

How can the Keesler Air Force Base Chapel provide spiritual care for spiritual-but-not-religious airmen? The chapel must embrace the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen by offering a spiritual conversations gathering and by conducting an annual spirituality survey. The answer to this problem is partly based on an understanding of student airmen, which reveals that they are influenced by a postmodern spirituality and are more interested in spirituality than in organized religion.

Postmodern culture has elevated interest in spirituality over organized religion, influencing some student airmen to be interested in spirituality but not in any particular religion. Just as effective physical fitness training must match the individual's physical fitness needs, so spiritual care must match the individual's spiritual needs. Chaplains cannot provide effective spiritual care for young airmen without an understanding of postmodern spirituality. The USAF Chaplaincy currently has no survey data upon which to create postmodern spiritual care. Care must change to match a changing spirituality. "Understanding is the basis of care."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 12.

The USAF spends many hours training maintainers to repair and operators to fly a new aircraft before utilizing that new aircraft in battle. The old aircraft training manuals and tools are useless, as is the pilot. Everyone who supports the operation of the new aircraft must understand the new aircraft. Lives can be lost if the USAF operates a new aircraft before developing new training. McLaren writes, “If you have a new world, you need a new church. You have a new world.”<sup>2</sup> In the same way, postmodern culture presents a new world to the chaplaincy. Christian chaplains must understand postmodern spirituality before they can effectively incarnate Jesus into postmodern culture.

Matching spiritual care with spiritual needs requires two steps. The first step involves understanding the person, the spiritual need, and the context. The second step involves responding in such a way as to improve spiritual health, based on the derived understanding. Chapter 2 fulfills step one by providing a broad understanding of postmodern spirituality and the postmodern student-airman. Chapter 6 fulfills step two by describing the solution.

Spiritually healthy airmen are better able to accomplish their mission. Arguing such a claim is moot, since Air Force Policy Directive 52-1 states, “In addition, spiritual health is fundamental to the well being of Air Force personnel and their families and essential for operational success.”<sup>3</sup> The USAF chaplaincy is interested in promoting spiritual health because USAF directs it to.

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<sup>2</sup> Brian D. McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 15.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Wynne, “Air Force Policy Directive 52-1,” Department of the Air Force, October 2, 2006), 1, <http://www.e-publishing.af.mil/shared/media/epubs/AFPD52-1.pdf> (accessed December 17, 2007).



The Air Force defines spiritual health as a vital component of human wellness.

Air Force Policy Directive 52-1 defines spiritual health in pluralistic terms:

It is that within us which motivates us in life and gives us strength and resiliency. It addresses questions such as meaning, purpose, values, self-worth, dignity, and hope. It promotes healthy interpersonal relationships, responsible living and the ability to respond effectively to stress, hardship, and tragedy. Spiritual health is not synonymous with religious health. An individual's spiritual health may, by personal choice, incorporate religious belief, just as it may be grounded in other concepts such as patriotism or the common good.<sup>4</sup>

A spiritually healthy person will display motivation in life no matter the challenge. Such motivation will lead the person, among other things, to seek answers to the ultimate questions of life, and to pursue healthy relationships. The last sentence of the definition admits that some people find their spirituality outside of religious belief.

Rolheiser writes, "Everyone has to have a spirituality."<sup>5</sup> He defines spirituality in

*The Holy Longing:*

Spirituality is about what we do with the fire inside of us, about how we channel our eros. And how we do channel it, the disciplines and habits we choose to live by, will either lead to a greater integration or disintegration within our bodies, minds, and souls, and to a greater disintegration or integration in the way we are related to God, others, and the cosmic world.<sup>6</sup>

Spirituality encompasses the integrity between the inner energy of life, and the disciplines and habits that channel that energy into behavior. A person is spiritually healthy to the extent they choose to live by disciplines and habits that lead to greater integration within self, with God, others, and the cosmos.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 18.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 11.

Rolheiser's definition approaches spirituality from within the Christian religion and incorporates a pluralistic view of spirituality which translates well into the pluralistic military culture. The postmodern interest in spirituality is an opportunity for Christian Chaplains to venture outside of their Christian "bubble"<sup>7</sup> to the margins of spirituality, and become missionaries to postmodern student airmen. Postmodern spirituality seeks to reintegrate the self, the self with others, and the self with God, all of which modernity disintegrated.<sup>8</sup>

The spiritual conversations gathering defines spirituality in terms of integration between inner values and outward behavior, a connection with God, others, and the world, and the motivation to face life's challenges.<sup>9</sup> Spiritually healthy individuals display motivation, as in the USAF definition, or "energy," "fire," or "vitality,"<sup>10</sup> as in Rolheiser's definition, for facing life's challenges. The values, beliefs, and disciplines utilized by individuals seeking these things are part of their spirituality. Many people turn to organized religion to provide motivation, integration, and connection; however, some postmodern airmen seek motivation, integration, and connection outside of organized religion.

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<sup>7</sup> Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus But Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 44.

<sup>8</sup> Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 4. Grenz believes postmodernism is the result of cultural fragmentation created by modernity. Postmodernism rejects fragmentation and prefers wholeness.

<sup>9</sup> The USAF chapel exists in a pluralistic environment. The author decided to not utilize an exclusively Christian definition because some students who are interested in a spiritual conversations gathering may have no reference to God in their spirituality. The author of this dissertation is Christian and is interested in connecting airmen with Jesus, and he believes Jesus is the only way to fulfill this definition of spirituality and become spiritually healthy.

<sup>10</sup> Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing*, 11.

### **A Short History of the Origins of Postmodern Culture**

A short history of the origins of postmodern culture and a comparison of the characteristics of the postmodern person with results of the student spirituality survey will substantiate the claims of this dissertation. Providing a comprehensive history of postmodern culture is outside the scope of this chapter; however a brief discussion of the postmodern culture's origins, beginning with Christendom, will aid in understanding the spirituality of student airmen.

The marriage between Church and State, which began with the Edict of Milan in A.D. 313, provided a "neat fit of certitude,"<sup>11</sup> and the birth of premodern culture. Ontology, developed through the Church's revelation, provided cultural integration, and the State's power provided enforcement.<sup>12</sup> Christendom dominated Western culture with its metanarrative of salvation-history for approximately 1,300 years. Christendom proclaimed that God was with and at work in human affairs through the authorities, providing human history with direction, purpose, and meaning. Christendom brought a blessing upon human history and provided a way to connect personal and local stories with the divine story. The author believes that Christendom brought a degree of wholeness to humanity through the traditions of the Church and the power of the State.

People lost confidence in the authorities as monarchies collapsed and church corruption was revealed. Thinkers, such as Descartes, advocated abandonment of both

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<sup>11</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Texts Under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 3.

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 377. Latourette comments that in Christendom, the power lent to the church by the empire was often opposite of that of the Gospel.

trust in revealed ontology, and trust in the salvation-history metanarrative in favor of a rational epistemology as a more certain foundation. “Descartes had declared that universal doubt should purge his mind of all opinions held merely on trust and open it to knowledge firmly grounded in reason.”<sup>13</sup> Within this context the Enlightenment was born.

Confidence in autonomy replaced confidence in the authorities. Reason took the place of revelation. Nature, no longer connected with its Creator, could be studied, explained by causality, controlled, and conquered to fit human purposes. In contrast to the Church and State, “Self became an absolute point of reference.”<sup>14</sup> Human rational thinking will solve any problem and progress the world if reason replaced mystery and tradition with knowledge. Removing the Church from a place of authority brought disintegration by advocating human autonomy over salvation-history, creating new paths that claimed progress.

The Enlightenment enabled rational belief systems that replaced Church tradition. Reason defined humanity’s path of progress differently than revelation. For example, the Grand Unification Theory (GUT) is a scientific attempt to define the path to progress. GUT replaces meta-narrative with meta-knowledge, gathering together all the theories of science into one grand theory.<sup>15</sup> A GUT would explain all natural law, describe God mathematically, and provide humans with absolute knowledge to conquer nature. Stephen Hawking explains several failed attempts in the twentieth-century to produce a GUT. He

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<sup>13</sup> Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 269.

<sup>14</sup> Brueggemann, *Texts Under Negotiation*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Davies, *God and the New Physics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 158. Davies calls the GUT “a master formula for the universe.”

writes, “I still believe that there are grounds for cautious optimism that we may now be near the end of the search for the ultimate laws of nature.”<sup>16</sup> Hawking published those words in 1988 and a GUT still eludes science.

Ray Kurzweil builds upon meta-knowledge to define progress with a transformed-humanity metanarrative. Kurzweil describes this meta-narrative with the word “singularity.” The singularity is “a future period during which the pace of technological change will be so rapid, its impact so deep, that human life will be irreversibly transformed.”<sup>17</sup> Kurzweil writes, “The Singularity will allow us to transcend these limitations of our biological bodies and brains. We will gain power over our fates. Our mortality will be in our own hands.”<sup>18</sup> He takes the GUT a little further, and proposes that humans can conquer nature and their own limitations. Given human history, it is difficult to be optimistic about how humans would utilize such power. Kurzweil seems to forget to factor in the human inclination to do evil. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. Science has left modernity’s question unanswered.

All is not lost in modernity. Science has brought tremendous advances, but at a cost. In the twentieth century, the peak of modernity, the world experienced two world wars, numerous territorial and ethnic cleansing wars, the development of weapons of mass destruction, the use of two atomic weapons on civilian populations, the Holocaust, the rise of terrorism, and environmental disasters such as Chernobyl and the Exxon Valdez oil spill. The knowledge and technology provided by scientific progress made all

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>17</sup> Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity Is Near* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 7.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 9.

these events possible. These events demonstrate the disintegration and disconnection which humanity can cause with too much knowledge. Adam and Eve's hunger for fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and its consequences still lingers.

Postmodern philosophy criticizes modernity's claims of progress. Long asserts that in postmodernity there is "a growing disillusionment with the technological society produced by scientific rationalism" and a "disenchantment with technology as an end in itself. Progress has not brought greater freedom or control over life but increasing rates of crime, greater social stratification, gridlocked cities, malfunctioning urban infrastructures and a poisoned atmosphere."<sup>19</sup> Time and time again, modernity has claimed progress but brought destruction. Consequently, postmodern culture expresses skepticism that reason and autonomy can fuel human progress.

Nations have claimed to uncover the path to human progress. In the author's view, Capitalism in the United States and communism in the former Soviet Union, both products of modernity, claim progress through meta-economics; one through individual accumulation of wealth, and the other through government-controlled sharing for the common good. Communism enabled a temporary superpower, and brought wealth to its *politburo* but at the expense of poverty for its citizens. Capitalism brings power and wealth to some citizens, but at the expense of justice for all. Nazi Germany's Third Reich claimed progress through fascism and used the term Final Solution to describe the Holocaust. Since the beginning of the Enlightenment, numerous revolutions have come and gone, also not able to fulfill their promises of progress. Lewis refers to such claims as

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<sup>19</sup> Jimmy Long, *Generating Hope: A Strategy for Reaching the Postmodern Generation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 10-11.

a “gruesome joke.”<sup>20</sup> Postmodern culture is skeptical that meta-anything leads to progress.

Reason alone, while increasing human knowledge, has not provided the integrity and connection at the heart of human spirituality. Reason, in many cases, has led to disintegration and disconnection. The pre-modern salvation-history meta-narrative said that God created the world and Jesus will progress the world to perfection, providing teleology to history and motivation to life. Modernity traded meta-narrative for meta-knowledge and disconnected God from human affairs, which eradicated teleology from history, and motivation from life. Lewis writes:

For once the eighteenth century finally prised off from the rudder of history the allegedly oppressive hand of a divine creator and redeemer, and declared humanity capable and free to channel its own course toward history’s heavenly harbor, it was a small step to the conclusion that history in fact had no rudder and was destined for no harbor, only storms and chaos.<sup>21</sup>

Postmodernity is a reaction to the storms and chaos created by modernity.

Science, nations, systems of belief, and institutions founded on reason failed to advance humanity. They left western culture fragmented and disintegrated and created the age of “utter skepticism . . . hostile to absolute claims from any source.”<sup>22</sup>

Modernity may have filled the head with knowledge, and the hands with technology, but it left the human heart empty. Johnston writes, “The crisis of modernity, you see, was a failure of the head to address the questions of the heart. Modernity could

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<sup>20</sup> Alan E. Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 333.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 266.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Lewis and Rob Wilkins, *The Church of Irresistible Influence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 38.

not adequately deal with one basic question: ‘Tell me who I am?’”<sup>23</sup> Postmodern culture has a hunger for an integrating, connecting, life-motivating spirituality. One would think that a culture void of public spirituality might lead to churches filled with seekers; however, this has not been the case. The modern Christian church, beginning with the Reformation, created its share of disintegration and disconnection by fracturing into an ever-increasing number of denominations, each claiming certainty under God’s blessing.

The modern Western Church can roughly be described under two branches. The liberal branch allowed modernity to explain away much of its faith such that faith became private. The conservative branch defended its faith through foundationalism, implementing the rational methods of modernity. McLaren suggests the church “constructed theology upon the foundation of an unassailable religious experience while conservatives looked to an error-free Bible as the incontrovertible foundation of their theology.”<sup>24</sup> Both approaches left Christian life fragmented.

Faith became private for the liberal branch, fracturing the Christian into sacred and secular and isolating them in their own existential experience. The liberal church accepted that scientific truth was public and factual, while faith was personal. “In the West, facts are public, while values are private.”<sup>25</sup> Faith for the conservative branch of the church, became dependent upon a rational system of beliefs based on an inerrant Bible.

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<sup>23</sup> Graham MacPherson Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World: A Guide to Reaching Twenty-First-Century Listeners* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 14.

<sup>24</sup> Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I Am a Missional, Evangelical, Post/Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Green, Incarnational, Depressed-Yet-Hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished Christian* (El Cajon, CA: Emergent YS, 2004), 11.

<sup>25</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 37.



The conservative branch of the church created a cognitive form of Christianity, which made God into a rational concept, and made the Christian life into a mechanical process. Postmodern individuals are skeptical when the church claims authoritative status for the Bible. “In the postmodern world, the authority of the Bible is brought into serious question.”<sup>26</sup>

Modernity’s motivation to conquer flowed into the church’s missionary efforts. Missionaries often treated mission fields as territories in need of conquering. Conversion to Christ also meant conversion to western thought. John Mott said, at the close of the 1910 World Missionary Conference, “The end of the Conference is the beginning of the conquest.”<sup>27</sup> Colonialism replaced incarnation, the Christian’s ultimate symbol of integration and connection.

Twentieth-century communication exposed church corruption to the world through individuals such as Jim Jones, Jim and Tammy Faye Baker, David Koresh, and Jimmy Swaggert or the Catholic Church scandals. The media uncovered Christian immorality and revealed “that we need to integrate both public morality and private reality to have something called ‘integrity.’”<sup>28</sup> The modern Western Church has reduced its ability to promote integration and connection.

In this context, many postmodern individuals do not turn to the organized church to support their spiritual health and search elsewhere. Pluralism, subjectivity, experience,

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<sup>26</sup> Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 30.

<sup>27</sup> John R. Mott, “Closing Address,” in *The History and Records of the Conference Together with Addresses Delivered at the Evening Meetings*, vol. 9 of *World Missionary Conference 1910* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1910), 347.

<sup>28</sup> McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 62.

and the desire for relationships drive their search for meaning. These factors are also reflected in the 2007 Keesler AFB student spirituality survey.

### **Understanding the Postmodern Individual and Student Airmen**

People influenced by postmodernity hold values different from the values of those influenced by modernity. The postmodern individual values pluralism and diversity in place of metanarratives and promises of human progress offered by modernity's meta-knowledge. The postmodern individual values subjectivity in addition to reason, experience in addition to knowledge, and relationships in addition to autonomy. The 2007 Keesler AFB student spirituality survey reflects each value. The following sections describe the postmodern individual and the Keesler AFB student airman.

#### **Pluralism**

The postmodern individual values pluralism over meta-anything. History is evacuated of purpose without a metanarrative that connects heaven and earth, leaving life disintegrated. Global travel and instant, worldwide communication bring people into contact with new worldviews. A local worldview, perhaps unchanged for centuries, is now challenged with a new and foreign worldview. The postmodern individual accepts that the Kingdom of God has been replaced with mini kingdoms, each equally valid. Johnston writes, "In brief, postmodernism refers to a worldview, a way of perceiving the world that is a backlash against the Enlightenment dream and dismisses any overarching set of ideas. Postmodernity is the worldview that says no worldview exists."<sup>29</sup> The

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<sup>29</sup> Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 27.

postmodern individual accepts multiple centers of truth in place of one universal truth.

The truth of Christianity is one truth among many truths.

The student spirituality survey reflected an acceptance of pluralism. One student said, "There is more curiosity now, and people are open to accepting other religious beliefs." Students who described themselves as Christian were also open to other faiths and curious about other beliefs. Another student told the author, "All religions are good." The spiritual-but-not-religious students have released their parental religious moorings and have set sail in a sea of spirituality. The students whom the author surveyed generally rejected the guidance of religions in favor of the freedom provided by a pluralistic culture. Several students expressed that they did not feel comfortable attending chapel because the chapel provides spirituality in terms of religion only.

The Constitution's two religious clauses have always made the USAF a pluralistic environment. Sensitivity to pluralism has increased since the 2005 incident at the Air Force Academy where it appeared that a senior officer was using his authority to convert airmen to his religion. The pluralistic military environment can provide an opportunity for experimentation for newly enlisted airmen who have been impacted by postmodern culture. Barna reported, in 2000, that six out of ten teens consider themselves to be spiritual without a relationship to their childhood religion.<sup>30</sup> Those teens are now enlisting in the USAF. A 2005 *Newsweek* survey of Americans reported that 79 percent believe someone of another faith can attain salvation or go to heaven.<sup>31</sup> Openness presents an

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<sup>30</sup> George Barna, *Third Millennium Teens: Research on the Minds, Hearts and Souls of America's Teenagers* (Ventura, CA: Barna Research Group, 2000), 8.

<sup>31</sup> Jerry Adler, "Where We Stand on Faith," *Newsweek*, September 5, 2005, 48.

opportunity for Christian chaplains to influence postmodern airmen to consider Jesus, if they can find ways to bridge the gap between the religious chapel and the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen.

### Subjectivity

The postmodern individual, void of trust in reason alone and in the systems of belief and institutions built on reason, turns to subjectivity. Facts are no longer accepted at face value, but rather accepted as “interpreted facts.”<sup>32</sup> Modernity filled the head but left the heart empty. McLaren writes, “In postmodernism, the analytical and critical rationality is taken one step further: It critiques not only the objective world and other people, but also the self and the self’s very ability to know and understand.”<sup>33</sup> The postmodern individual, having a limited ability to know with certainty, is open to faith as part of the path to be integrated and connected. Faith exists in the world of subjectivity. Johnston says that there is a natural inclination for postmodern individuals to live by some sort of faith, since certainty and absolutes are questioned. Johnston writes:

The Enlightenment brought with it the belief that the subjective world of values and faith are less important than the objective world of science and reason. Postmodernity turns this around, and says the subjective, with its emotions, intuition, and spirituality is all we have. All you can believe is what’s in your own heart. Count on intuition and faith, give up on the idea of truth, have an experience instead.<sup>34</sup>

The postmodern individual also values experience. The rejection of metanarrative also removed guiding boundaries, forcing the postmodern person to follow subjective

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<sup>32</sup> Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals*, 84.

<sup>33</sup> McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 162.

<sup>34</sup> Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 9.

experience as a guide. Myers writes, “Experience is the new currency of our culture. In the past we gained knowledge of a subject or issue and then later validated that knowledge. Today, people have an experience that is later validated by knowledge.”<sup>35</sup>

The student spirituality survey reflects this subjectivity. In response to the statement, “In worship I'd rather have a personal experience with God or gain information about him,” 61 percent of those surveyed choose to have an experience with God. In response to the statement, “My spirituality is enhanced by experiences or by acquiring knowledge,” 61 percent agreed that their spirituality is enhanced more by experience than knowledge. Experience not only stimulates but also validates authentic spirituality. Johnston writes, “The only true understanding that anyone can ever speak of is what's been personally experienced.”<sup>36</sup>

The Student Spirituality Survey revealed that students who have attended Christian worship prefer an experience with God and authentic worship over professionally performed worship. The same students also prefer learning through stories and dialogue rather than through a linear sermon lecture. Students spend more than thirty hours per week in a military classroom and are not interested in more lectures. Students reported that spiritual experiences are not confined to worship. One student explained a near death experience. He said, “I got through it because something held my hand.” One student shared that during Mass one Sunday he decided that he no longer believed. The student saw the movie *Dogma*, which brought him back to faith. Music, art, nature,

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<sup>35</sup> Joseph R. Myers, *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups* (Grand Rapids, MI: Youth Specialties, 2003), 186.

<sup>36</sup> Johnson, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 33.

surfing, prayer, meditation, Bible reading, and volunteering to help others can lead students to have spiritual experiences. The students expressed that religion was too directive and narrow regarding how to have religious experiences. If postmodern individuals are sensitive to subjectivity and accepting of experience as a path to truth, then they are open to faith.

### Relationships

In modernity, the rational discovery of truth was paramount for certainty. Long indicates that postmodern individuals have rejected expending much energy toward the discovery of truth or certainty. Instead, effort is placed in relationships. Long writes, “Truth is less essential to this generation than relationships. Their understanding of truth is greatly influenced by the community in which they are involved.”<sup>37</sup> Postmodern individuals form truth out of community. Truth has become contextual, creating a dilemma for student airman.

According to the student spirituality survey, student airmen value relationships. One hundred percent of those surveyed said that they prefer a church where a person can belong before they believe. They have a need to connect. Unfortunately, relationships are not important to the military. The military tends to dehumanize individuals through conformity to a universal mission. Dehumanizing intensifies with the nomadic nature of the airman’s life, which constantly connects and disconnects relationships and changes contexts. Students face a dilemma where truth is contextual, and the context is dynamic.

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<sup>37</sup> Long, *Generating Hope*, 76.

Roxburgh writes that in modernity “Everything is temporary and discardable.”<sup>38</sup>

The mission always comes first in the military. It does not stop in order to take care of the needs of individuals. People and relationships are as discardable as a worn out uniform. Some airmen feel they need to “cocoon,”<sup>39</sup> perhaps to protect themselves and minimize the pain created by temporary relationships and a dynamic context. The disintegration of airmen is accelerated when they choose isolation while feeling the need to relate.

Roxburgh suggests a move back to a “deeply communal sense of life.”<sup>40</sup> One of the greatest opportunities for Christian chaplains is the postmodern need to be communal, relational, and connected because Christianity emphasizes relationships. God’s mission, as discussed in Chapter 4, is to create, sustain, and restore relationships. The desire to be related reflects a characteristic of the *Imago Dei* after which humanity was created. God Himself exists as a fellowship of three persons. If the Christian chaplain can find ways to establish relationships among spiritual-but-not-religious students, group them together, and expose them to Jesus then perhaps this “dehumanizing anonymity”<sup>41</sup> can be offset. A connection with each other and with God through Jesus is required for any person to be spiritually healthy.

The student spirituality survey indicates that students are open to something or someone transcendent. When the author asked what spirituality means to students, they all responded with some form of higher power, God, or gods. They used phrases such as

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<sup>38</sup> Roxburgh, *Reaching a New Generation*, 39.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>41</sup> Sally Morgenthaller, *Worship Evangelism: Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 120.

“something that’s more,” “connection to the unseen,” and “a comforting presence in my life.” Spirituality involves an awareness of this relationship and the centrality of this relationship. Wright asserts, “If there’s any truth in the thirst for spirituality it could be simply that humans find satisfaction in exploring a spiritual dimension to their lives, or it could be that we are made for relationship with another Being who can only be known that way.”<sup>42</sup>

The student spirituality survey also indicated student interest in forming relationships with other spiritual-but-not-religious students. They enjoy having a sense of community that replaces what they lost by moving away from home. The students value friends and welcome fellow spiritual-but-not-religious students. They were surprised at the number of students who were like them and suggested a regular spiritual discussion group to gather such students.

### Spirituality

Modernity’s disconnection between heaven and earth traded revelation for reason, and created a spiritual vacuum. Modernity attempted to fill the vacuum with knowledge, technology, and hope in human progress. The author feels that postmodern individuals look to fill their empty hearts and find connection and integration. Morganthaller writes, “A growing spiritual receptivity prevails in American society today.”<sup>43</sup> A *Newsweek* survey reported that 24 percent of those surveyed considered themselves to be spiritual but were not religious, and that 55 percent were both religious and spiritual. Eighty-four

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<sup>42</sup> N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (San Francisco: Harper, 2006), 51.

<sup>43</sup> Morganthaller, *Worship Evangelism*, 59.



percent of those surveyed said that spirituality in their daily lives was either very or somewhat important.<sup>44</sup> A 2004 study found that 66 percent of those surveyed believe God exists and 77 percent pray at least once per week.<sup>45</sup> A University of Nottingham survey revealed that the percentage of people reporting spiritual experiences has increased from forty-eight in 1987 to seventy-six in 2000.<sup>46</sup> The increase is amazing given that modernity attempted to remove God completely from human affairs. Table 1 illustrates the results of the University of Nottingham survey.

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<sup>44</sup> Adler, "Where We Stand on Faith," 48.

<sup>45</sup> Bob Altemeyer, "The Decline of Organized Religion in Western Civilization," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 14, no. 2 (2004): 79.

<sup>46</sup> Hay and Hunt, *Understanding the Spirituality of People Who Don't Go to Church*, 13.

Table 1. Percentage of People Reporting Spiritual Experiences

| Type of Experience                    | % in 1987 | % in 2000 |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| A Patterning of Events                | 29        | 55        |
| Awareness of the Presence of God      | 27        | 38        |
| Awareness of Answered Prayer          | 25        | 37        |
| Awareness of Holy Presence in Nature  | 16        | 29        |
| Awareness of Presence of the Dead     | 18        | 25        |
| Awareness of an Evil Presence         | 12        | 25        |
| Total Reporting Spiritual Experiences | 48        | 76        |

Interest in organized religion appears to be on the decline while spirituality is on the rise. In 1972, 41 percent of Americans reported attending church regularly, whereas in 2000, 32 percent reported attending church regularly and 54 percent reported they never or almost never attend church.<sup>47</sup> Based on British census data, Brierley found that 12 percent of the English population attended church every week in 1979, 10 percent attended weekly in 1989, and 7.5 percent attended weekly in 1998.<sup>48</sup> Spirituality has become “do-it-yourself.”<sup>49</sup> Some Christians are moving to a “non-church-based faith.”<sup>50</sup>

Church attendance decline may be a result of the church’s reaction to modernity. The liberal and conservative reactions to the Enlightenment were based on rationalism. The liberal reaction bowed to modernism by allowing faith to be driven into the private realm, creating disintegration between the Christian’s inner and outer life.<sup>51</sup> Postmodern

<sup>47</sup> Altemeyer, “The Decline of Organized Religion in Western Civilization,” 79.

<sup>48</sup> P. Brierley, *The Tide Is Running Out: What the English Church Attendance Survey Tells Us* (London: Christian Research, 2000), 13.

<sup>49</sup> Morgenthaller, *Worship Evangelism*, 61.

<sup>50</sup> Alan Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith: Faith Journeys Beyond the Churches* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2002), 16.

<sup>51</sup> Roxburgh, *Reaching a New Generation*, 59. Roxburgh writes, “Christianity, in its embrace of modernity, relegated the supernatural to the inner personal experience of the pious individual.”

individuals appear to favor wholeness.<sup>52</sup> The conservative reaction adopted the rational methods of modernity to defend itself against modernity, turning a connection with God into a concept about God. Postmodern individuals do not want a concept; they want a “supernatural relationship with a powerful, living God.”<sup>53</sup>

The military chapel, not being allowed by law to be of a particular denomination, has the agility to adjust to postmodern spirituality. The rising interest in spirituality presents to the Christian chaplain a great opportunity to influence students to follow Jesus, if the chaplain can find ways to leave the religious bubble,<sup>54</sup> and venture into the mission field of the spiritual margins.

### Challenges

Spiritual-but-not-religious airmen are weightless, subject to the dynamic context of the military, their own subjectivity, and their community. They distrust meta-anything and therefore do not have guidance in their spirituality. The student spirituality survey revealed that students believe faith is a dynamic journey and something to explore. One student responded, “You never arrive.” They expressed that their spirituality makes them “open to change,” and that truth varies depending in the situation. One student said, “I have more questions than answers.” All of the students surveyed rejected any form of mechanical, step-by-step program to conform their spirituality to a particular religion.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 37-39. Roxburgh discusses the fragmentation created by the Enlightenment, and the resulting postmodern desire for wholeness.

<sup>53</sup> Morgenthaller, *Worship Evangelism*, 65.

<sup>54</sup> Kimball, *They Like Jesus But Not the Church*, 44.

They were not interested in attending Sunday School because it felt too “stuffy.” They seemed comfortable with a spiritual journey that has no defined destination.

One trajectory for adapting to postmodern spirituality is offering the chaplain as a fellow spiritual explorer. The Christian Chaplain can be that fellow explorer provided that the chaplain can leave the Christian bubble<sup>55</sup> and become incarnational and missional. The chaplain can be the force which bends the religions path of the chapel, and intersects it with the spiritual path of the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen so that they can access spiritual care.

The chaplain must find a way to overcome the student’s fear of rank. Chaplains are officers. The USAF trains students to treat all officers with great respect, creating an authority gap between the student and the officer. Students hesitate talking to a chaplain because of a much higher rank. Students told the author that it is “strange” to mix a “boss” with a “spiritual guide.” Students may not feel they can share the intimacy of their spiritual journey with a chaplain until the chaplain makes them feel comfortable.

It seems that the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen have been largely ignored while at the same time the USAF tasks the chapel to care for the spiritual health of all airmen. Keesler AFB is where newly-enlisted airmen receive their training. If the chapel seeks to understand and adapt to these students now, perhaps they will engage the chapels at their future bases for their spiritual care. Airmen are required to adapt to the USAF in all other areas of their training. The chapel should adapt to the airmen with the incarnation as the example. Such adaptation demonstrates the love of God. The chapel is

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

like the rest of the USAF if it requires airmen to conform. A lack of adaptation will hinder the Keesler AFB Chapel from fostering spiritually healthy airmen and may lead the airman elsewhere or nowhere to meet their future spiritual need, and first impressions are important.

The student spirituality survey included only eighteen of 3,000 students, and thirty-five originally signed-up to participate. Airmen may not have had the two hours required for participation due to a busy schedule. Projecting the spirituality of eighteen onto 3,000 students is unwise. The author of this dissertation spends over an hour each week with every new class that arrives at Keesler AFB and accomplishes an informal, verbal, spiritual survey with each new class. Consistently, 10 to 15 percent of each new class indicates they are spiritual but not necessarily religious.

The results of the Student Spirituality Survey are very similar to the spirituality of the civilian postmodern population described in this chapter. The Student Spirituality Survey may or may not accurately reflect the spirituality of the student population. The newly-enlisted airmen come from the civilian postmodern population. The evidence cited from the civilian postmodern population indicates that the chapel needs to adapt new ways of spiritual care to reach a new generation. The books and articles cited in this chapter show evidence that civilian postmodern individuals are more interested in spirituality than in religion. There is no evidence known to the author of this dissertation that suggest newly-enlisted airmen are unlike the general population.

### Summary

The Keesler AFB chapel needs to embrace the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen by offering a spiritual conversations gathering. Chapter 2 provides an understanding of the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen as a foundation upon which to base this new gathering. The understanding provided by this chapter shows not only that postmodern culture has elevated interest in spirituality over organized religion, but also that the spirituality of Keesler AFB's student airmen may be very similar to the spirituality of the general postmodern population. This understanding supports the primary claim of this dissertation by indicating that the chapel's current religious approach, which is the subject of the next chapter, may not adequately provide resources needed by student airmen. If it is not adequate, then the chapel needs to adjust. Organized religion is an expression of spirituality that some people want; however a growing number of postmodern individuals find organized religion too narrow. Some believe they can relate to God without all of the unnatural structure the organized church imposes.

Chapter 2 provides an understanding of the history and characteristics of postmodern spirituality, so that the chaplain can better understand the airmen he or she serves. Survey data provided by this chapter supports the primary claim of this dissertation. The chapel can use this data as it incorporates a spiritual conversations gathering and an annual spirituality survey into its ministry. The USAF Chaplaincy, prior to the author's survey, had no data regarding the spirituality of newly enlisted airmen.

Chapter 3 will focus on the religious chapel, which takes a path parallel to the spiritual-but-not-religious airman. Parallel lines never cross. Spiritual-but-not-religious

airmen may not find the spiritual care they need to be spiritually healthy unless the chapel finds a way to bridge the gap between spiritual-but-not-religious airmen and the religious chapel.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE RELIGIOUS CHAPEL

How can the Keesler Air Force Base Chapel provide spiritual care for spiritual-but-not-religious airmen? The chapel must embrace the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen by offering a spiritual conversations gathering and by conducting an annual spirituality survey. The answer to this problem is partly based on an understanding of the chapel, which currently provides spiritual care mostly through a variety of religions. The chapel follows values that are counter to the postmodern values described in chapter 2. Religions can create barriers for spiritual-but-not-religious airmen by valuing institution over relationship and conformity over diversity.

The chapel serves the community and offers a variety of religious activities such as worship, rites, and education, all of which require conformity to a religion. Each religion contains a unique set of disciplines and habits that integrate inner values with outward behavior, maintain a connection with God, others, and the world, and provide motivation to face life's challenges. The spirituality of a person seeking spiritual care may or may not match the set of disciplines and habits provided by a traditional religion. Chapter 2 revealed that a significant number of student airmen seek spiritual care outside of a traditional religion. An airman's spiritual health may suffer if the chapel provides spiritual care only by offering religious activities.



Religious activities are adequate to meet the needs of airmen who are religious, but inadequate to meet the needs of spiritual-but-not-religious airmen. Effective physical fitness training considers and responds to a person's physical fitness needs, and effective spiritual care must match spiritual needs. A mismatch between care and needs limits effective training by creating barriers. A mismatch occurs when the physical fitness and spiritual caregiver fail to consider the needs of the individual receiving care.

The chapel's religions present conformity barriers to spiritual-but-not-religious airmen. Spirituality is the set of disciplines and habits that integrate inner values and outward behavior, connection with God, others, and the world, and motivation to face life's challenges. Spirituality varies greatly between people. Some individuals seek spiritual care by conforming to the spirituality of a particular religion, and others seek spiritual care outside of a traditional religion.

### **Sources of the Chapel's Religious Activities**

Three factors shape the chapel's religious activities: the laws which authorize and empower the chapel, the chaplains who provide the ministry, and, in the case of the Christian community, the lingering influence of Christendom. These three factors are present in the way the Keesler AFB chapel utilizes its resources to accomplish ministry. The factors are built on values which run counter to postmodern values and create barriers for spiritual-but-not-religious airmen. An annual spirituality survey and an ongoing spiritual conversations gathering can circumvent the barriers.

A description of how every religion fails or succeeds to meet the spiritual needs of the spiritual-but-not-religious student is outside this dissertation's scope. The Department of Defense (DoD) currently recognizes 238 religious groups.<sup>1</sup> The chapel's Christian community will be the primary religious focus of this chapter in order to motivate Christian chaplains to become missional.

### Military Documents

The first factor shaping the chapel's religious activities is military law. Military laws provide definition and boundaries for the chapel in the same way that federal, state, and municipal laws provide definition and boundaries for a business. As long as laws address the local situations faced by the business owner, they are beneficial. If a business owner faces local situations that are outside of the boundaries and definitions provided by the laws, then the laws are restrictive and may damage the business.

The law, for example, may require that a physical fitness instructor be properly trained and licensed before they can offer classes to the public. An unqualified instructor may injure a customer. The law protects the business and the customers. A business may suffer if the neighborhood turns Hispanic and the instructor cannot speak Spanish. The law may not require the instructor to speak Spanish. The business-owner is not required to provide a Spanish-speaking instructor, but should if they care about customers. The customers would need to conform to the instructor's language to benefit from the classes.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Baldwin, *United States Air Force Chaplain Service Strategic Plan* (Washington DC: Office of the Chief of Chaplains, 2004), 16.

Chapels must follow military law by providing Air Force members with opportunities to freely exercise their religion. The free exercise of religion dominates military law from the Constitution to Air Force instructions. A law cannot address every local situation. The older a law is, the less likely that it will address local situations. A law written under the influence of the Enlightenment, for example, may not address a postmodern culture.

The military chapel is defined and bounded by the Constitution's two religious clauses: the free exercise clause, and the establishment clause. The Constitution states, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." The clauses prevent Congress both from defining an official religion and banning expression of religion. Everything related to chapels, chaplains, and chaplaincy is based on Constitutional freedom of religion. The Constitution is heavily influenced by objective categories of the Enlightenment.

During the Enlightenment, individuals viewed spirituality as being esoteric to organized religion. Rolheiser points out that it is only within the last thirty years that the word spirituality has become common English vocabulary.<sup>2</sup> Spirituality is now mainstream. Chapter 2 argued that postmoderns value a subjective, individual spirituality over modernity's objective, institutional religion.

The military chapel is defined and bounded by Title 10 of the U.S. Code. Title 10 codifies the freedom of religion into law for the Armed Forces. Title 10 offers a short job description for the chaplain: "Each chaplain shall, when practicable, hold appropriate

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<sup>2</sup> Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing*, 5.

religious services at least once on each Sunday for the command to which he is assigned, and shall perform appropriate religious burial services for members of the Air Force who die while in that command.”<sup>3</sup> Title 10 does not explicitly require the chaplain to provide spiritual care, only religious services on Sunday. The job description seems to only fit a Christian chaplain, since Sunday is the day of worship for Christians. Title 10 is Christian-centric and reflects a lack of diversity.

The military chapel is defined and bound by Department of Defense Directive 1300.17 which implements Title 10’s law for all DOD departments. “A basic principle of our nation is free exercise of religion. The Department of Defense places a high value on the rights of members of the Armed Forces to observe the tenets of their respective religions.”<sup>4</sup> The directive does not mention individual spirituality or spiritual health, but mentions religions that contain tenets. The directive implies that a person who wishes to exercise freedom of religion must conform to some organized religious institution.

The directive also gives guidance to commanders when a military member asks permission to wear religious items while in uniform. “Under this Directive, ‘religious apparel’ is defined as articles of clothing worn as part of the doctrinal or traditional observance of the religious faith practiced by the member.”<sup>5</sup> Religious apparel worn with the uniform is allowed only if it is a practice rooted in the doctrine or tradition of an

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<sup>3</sup> House Committee on Armed Services, “Defense-Related Laws (as Amended through December 31, 2003),” vol. 1, 108<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., March 2004, 1574, <http://www.house.gov/hasc/comdocs/reports/Title10UnitedStatesCode.pdf> (accessed January 4, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> William H. Taft, “Department of Defense Directive 1300.17: Accommodation of Religious Practices within the Military Services,” ed. Department of Defense (1988), 2, <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/130017p.pdf> (accessed January 4, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 3.

organized religious institution. The directive ignores individual spirituality, assuming that the person making the request conforms to a particular organized religious institution.

The USAF chapel is defined and bound by Air Force Policy Directive 52-1, which constructs a two part mission for the Air Force Chaplain Service. “The Air Force Chaplain Service provides spiritual care and the opportunity for Air Force members, their families, and other authorized personnel to exercise their Constitutional right to the free exercise of religion.”<sup>6</sup> The directive expands the chaplain’s mission from religion to spiritual care for the first time, authorizing the Air Force chapel to move beyond ministry based on a religion to ministry based on spirituality.

The USAF Chaplaincy recognizes the need for chapels to expand spiritual care beyond categories of religion. The USAF definition of spiritual health changed in 2006. AFD 52-1 significantly expands the definition of spiritual health beyond religious categories. “An individual’s spiritual health may, by personal choice, incorporate religious belief, just as it may be grounded in other concepts such as patriotism or the common good.”<sup>7</sup>

The USAF chapel is defined and bound by the USAF Chief of Chaplains who supports an expansion of spiritual care. Surveys show religion continues to play a significant role in the day-to-day lives of a majority of Americans; however, there is a movement away from identifying individual religious preference or adherence to a particular faith group as well as a greater variety of faith groups. The United States was founded on the principle of religious tolerance, and throughout its history, the American

<sup>6</sup> Wynne, “Air Force Policy Directive 52-1,” 1.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 5.

religious landscape has become increasingly diverse. Today there are Islamic centers and mosques, Hindu and Buddhist temples, and meditation centers in every major American city. In addition to organized religions, there is also a renewed interest in spirituality among the American public, particularly among American youth. The Chaplain Service is dedicated to fostering a culture that values a growing diversity.

The vision of the Air Force Chaplain Service is that Chaplains should glorify God, honor airmen, and serve all,<sup>8</sup> not just those who are religious. The USAF provides an opportunity for chapels to move beyond providing religious goods and services by recognizing the importance of spiritual care. A chapel has the freedom to address local spirituality while providing traditional expressions of religion. A chapel, which limits spiritual care to Christian religious worship and education, requires the airman, who seeks spiritual care, to conform. Failure to move beyond religious activities may continue a decline in chapel participation and in the spiritual health of airmen.

#### The Chaplain Commissioning Process

The second factor that shapes the chapel's religious activities is the chaplain commissioning process, which selects and qualifies civilian clergy to become military chaplains. The background of a chaplain influences the chapel where he serves in the same way that the background of any leader influences their community. DOD Instruction 1304.28 requires every chaplain to be educated, qualified, and endorsed by one of DOD's 238 recognized religious institutions. Chaplains are an extension of the religious institutions that prepare them for ministry. The instruction states:

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<sup>8</sup> Baldwin, *United States Air Force Chaplain Service Strategic Plan*, 2.

To be considered for appointment to serve as a chaplain, an RMP (religious ministry professional) shall receive an endorsement from a qualified religious organization verifying the RMP is a fully qualified RMP of a religious organization that meets the administrative requirements of this Instruction.<sup>9</sup>

For example, a civilian Christian pastor must meet the education and ordination requirements of their denomination before applying for active duty as a chaplain. The pastor must also meet the more stringent endorsement requirements. Religious institutions loan pastors to the USAF and expect them to abide by the beliefs and practices of their denomination. Religious institutions can withdraw endorsement if a chaplain fails to follow their beliefs, which ends the chaplain's military career. Religious institutions influence chaplains throughout their careers.

Every religious institution has a unique spirituality, theology, ecclesiology, worldview, and belief system. Education, experience, and endorsement transmit this unique spirituality to chaplains, who bring it with them into the military. All chaplains have a spirituality that is based on their qualifying religious institution. A religious group qualifies their chaplain to be an expert in their view of spirituality. Chaplains practice the spirituality of their religious group while in the military. Chaplains minister to and counsel with airmen based on their religious group's spirituality. An airman whose spirituality is significantly different than the spirituality of the chaplain providing care may not find the care they need. Postmodern airmen, who have a spirituality not based on a religious institution, will not find a chaplain with a similar spirituality. The chaplain qualification process shapes the chapel's emphasis on religious activities.

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<sup>9</sup> Charles S. Abell, "Department of Defense Instruction 1304.28," (Department of Defense, 2007), 3.

### A Lingering Christendom Culture

The third factor that shapes the chapel's emphasis on religious activities is a lingering Christendom culture. Postmodern airmen reflect the postmodern civilian culture and the chapel's Christian community follows the Christendom-influenced civilian church. What happens in civilian churches that can be distasteful to postmodern individuals also happens in chapels.

In the beginning of the USAF in 1947,<sup>10</sup> Christianity was a major influence on American culture. Christendom may have officially ended in 1791 with the 1st Amendment to the Constitution, but it continued impact the worldview of people at least until the 1950s.<sup>11</sup>

The chapel provides airmen with access to a variety of religions. Christianity is the dominant religion at the Keesler AFB Chapel, and all current Keesler AFB chaplains are Christian. In the chapel's Christian community there are elements of Frost and Hirsch's "Christendom mode"<sup>12</sup> at work. The USAF is the state, the chapel is the church, and the chaplain is the robed priest.<sup>13</sup>

A lingering Christendom culture is evidenced by the chapel's variety of segregated Christian worship services, which make the chapel more attractional than incarnational. The chapel attempts to be attractional by offering various styles of worship

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<sup>10</sup> The National Security Act of 1947 authorized the formation of the Department of the Air Force.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Robinson and Dwight Smith, *Invading Secular Space: Strategies for Tomorrow's Church* (London: Monarch, 2003), 49.

<sup>12</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 9f.

<sup>13</sup> McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side*, 160.



services, reducing the Christian community from a missionary enterprise to a provider of institutional goods and services.

The chapel offers a Catholic Mass and a variety of Protestant worship services. The Protestant worship services differ in style, music, and in population. The Traditional Service, which roughly conforms to Webber's Traditional Worship style<sup>14</sup> is formal and sings hymns accompanied by an organ, piano, and a choir. The majority of the chapel's retired population and some active-duty families attend the Traditional Service. The Gospel Service is Pentecostal, utilizing African-American gospel songs accompanied by a variety of instruments and choirs. The majority of the chapel's African-American community attends the Gospel Service. The Contemporary Service, which roughly conforms to Webber's pragmatic style, is informal and sings contemporary Christian music accompanied by guitars and drums. The majority of the chapel's student community attends the Contemporary Service. The most segregated place on Keesler AFB is the chapel on Sunday. The Christian population worships separately.

Postmodern individuals accept diversity, but not segregation. Students who participated in the spirituality survey described the chapel as a "fragmented" community. Students expressed the need to put aside religious differences. One student said, "Spirituality is common to all, and it's religions that divide us."

The modern church may see this grouping of worship services as a positive attempt to meet a wide variety of needs. The chapel does meet the needs of the approximately 537 individuals who attend each weekend; however the chapel is

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<sup>14</sup> Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals*, 17.

inadequate to meet the needs of the spiritual-but-not-religious airman, who remain a silent minority. Less than 7 percent of Keesler's population attend worship on any given weekend, while 83 percent of Keesler's population claim some form of Christianity.

Using segregation as an attempt to be attractional is encouraged by the language of AFI 52-101:

Chaplains will lead worship services that target a broad population possessing common beliefs and desiring a specific style of worship. The terms "liturgical," "traditional," "contemporary," "gospel," "praise," "evangelical," or "charismatic" are used to identify exclusively chaplain-led worship of a particular style designed to meet the needs inclusive of several denominations and/or a broad population. Chaplain leadership ensures attentiveness to needs and sensitivity to the diversity of those attending these worship services. Services must be advertised and promoted by style, character, and doctrinal content.<sup>15</sup>

The chapel must meet a broad range of needs by offering a variety of worship services. The chapel takes a consumerist approach to worship and attempts to be attractional. The chapel's approach to worship fractures the Christian community. The Christian worship services attract those who fit specific styles but isolate the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen who do not fit. The spiritual-but-not-religious airmen are seeking connection and relationship, not fracture and division.

Worship segregation based on a particular style of worship is "pseudocorporate."<sup>16</sup> Segregating worship based on style gives priority to personal human preferences over incarnation. Segregated worship perpetuates the institutional aspects of the chapel, which repels the spiritual-but-not-religious student who values relationships over institutions. The chapel claims that all Christian needs are covered through its

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<sup>15</sup> Baldwin, *United States Air Force Chaplain Service Strategic Plan*, 6.

<sup>16</sup> Harold M. Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 74.

variety of worship services. There is one Christian need that is missing; the need for the church to be the body of Christ. Christ is not divided.

The language of AFI 52-101 encourages attractional worship.<sup>17</sup> The terms “liturgical,” “gospel,” “praise,” “evangelical,” and “charismatic” are Christian terms. These terms describe Christian styles of worship, without actually using the word Christian. If a person does not fit the chapel’s current offering of Christian-centric worship, then they are invited to worship off base.

The chapel’s Christian-centric religious activities assume that one size fits all. The low worship attendance statistics indicate that one size actually fits few. The Keesler chapel has created a three-sided Christian bubble:<sup>18</sup> Contemporary, Gospel, and Traditional, none of which fit the spiritual-but-not-religious airman.

Attractional worship perpetuates itself through an annual survey for religious needs. The USAF Chaplaincy requires every chapel to conduct an annual religious needs survey. The Keesler AFB chapel archives revealed that surveys have been collected mostly from those who already attend worship. Few outside the chapel have been surveyed, except for base leadership such as commanders and first sergeants. There is no evidence that students have ever been surveyed, until the student spirituality survey. The chapel’s annual survey process creates a feedback loop that reinforces the current religious worship structure, and ignores the spiritual-but-not-religious students. The chapel’s Christian community continues to offer the same worship structure year after year while culture has dramatically changed.

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<sup>17</sup> Lorraine K. Potter, “Air Force Instruction 52-101,” ed. US Air Force (2004), 6.

<sup>18</sup> Kimball, *They Like Jesus But Not the Church*, 44.

The chapel needs to engage the student culture “on its own turf”<sup>19</sup> by adding a missional component to its ministry. The church needs to target subcultures if it is to be successful in a pluralistic environment.<sup>20</sup> The spiritual-but-not-religious students are one such subculture. A spiritual conversations gathering is one approach to engaging the spiritual-but-not-religious students in a missional way. Chapter 6 discusses trajectories for accomplishing ways to target spiritual-but-not-religious students.

A lingering Christendom culture is evidenced by the design of the Air Force chapel sanctuaries. Just as the civilian church is more dualistic than messianic, so is the military chapel. The Air Force Religious Facilities Design Guide dictates chapel building construction. The guide requires that the chapel’s sanctuary highlight the vertical dimension,<sup>21</sup> creating sacred space for religious worship and reinforcing Christendom’s dualism which separates sacred from secular. Religious worship is the only activity which can take place in the chapel sanctuary. All of it takes place in the sanctuary in practice. Separation of sacred from secular does not appeal to postmodern individuals who see life not in dualistic terms, but as “whole-of-life spirituality.”<sup>22</sup> The spirituality survey revealed that the spiritual-but-not-religious students prefer an integrated life over a compartmentalized life.

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<sup>19</sup> Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, advanced reading version (Brazos Press: Grand Rapids, MI: 2006), 37.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>21</sup> Dave Duncan, *USAF Religious Facilities Design Guide* (Department of the Air Force, 2000), 15, <http://www.afcee.brooks.af.mil/dc/dcd/ARCH/religious/index.html> (accessed September 5, 2007).

<sup>22</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 21.

Dualism enables a passive view of worship, where the chaplain performs while the congregation watches. The guide states:

The Sanctuary is the primary space used for traditional religious worship services and consists of two distinct areas: the Chancel and the Nave. The Chancel contains such elements as a baptistry, a choir loft, the altar, and a podium and the religious service is conducted there. The Nave is where the congregation sits to view the service.<sup>23</sup>

Christian-centric language describes the sanctuary built with federal dollars to support a plurality of religions. The description implies that a worship service should be passively viewed by a congregation. The guide provides sample sanctuary designs which are very similar to Hirsch's traditional Christian church model where people come to escape from culture and "get fed."<sup>24</sup> Chapter 2 argues that the postmodern individual values experience and participation. The chapel is structured to provide an objective worship event separated from the rest of life and passively viewed by the congregation.

A lingering Christendom culture is evidenced by the chapel's hierarchical structure. Just as the civilian Christian church is more hierarchical than apostolic, so is the chapel. AFI 52-101<sup>25</sup> places chaplains in charge of each worship service. Christendom and military hierarchy are both present in the chapel, creating a hyper-hierarchy that gives the chaplain total responsibility and absolute control. The chapel invites volunteers to participate in the chapel, but they are always subject to the desires of the chaplain. The chaplain can fire volunteers at will, without any ecclesiastical involvement.

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<sup>23</sup> Duncan, *USAF Religious Facilities Design Guide*, 8.

<sup>24</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 43.

<sup>25</sup> Potter, "Air Force Instruction 52-101," 6.

A hierarchical form of Christianity would be present in the military chapel without the influence of Christendom because hierarchy is part of the military culture and influences everything the military does. Christendom's hierarchy easily fits into the chapel structure. The chaplain in charge of worship is subordinate to either a Senior Faith Group Chaplain, the Wing Chaplain, or to the Wing Commander. The relationship depends on the chaplain's rank and the structure of the installation. A chaplain who leads worship may be subordinate to a chaplain of a different faith, or to a non-chaplain officer who has no faith. Military hierarchy dominates ecclesial factors.

Military hierarchy can make the chaplain fearful that an apostolic form of ministry might lead to a lack of control, violating AFI 52-101. The chaplain's fear impacts participation. Students may not feel comfortable offering their spiritual gifts for use in the chapel with such a dominant hierarchy. Kimball reports that postmodern individuals dislike church hierarchy. One person he interviewed said, "The church is about hierarchy, power, and control with a political agenda."<sup>26</sup> Another person responded, "The church is made of leaders who function like CEOs and desire power and control."<sup>27</sup> A third person said, "But, in our emerging culture, this comes across very unlike Jesus, since it equates the church with big business and only reinforces the idea that the church is organized religion."<sup>28</sup>

The barrier created by hierarchy can impact the chaplain who wants to form relationships with students since the chaplain outranks the students. The spirituality

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<sup>26</sup> Kimball, *They Like Jesus But Not the Church*, 76.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 80.

survey revealed that some students are scared of the chaplain and hesitate to talk with a chaplain because of rank. One student commented, “It is strange to mix a boss with a spiritual guide.”

Christendom prolongs the chapel’s emphasis on religious activities. Out of the 593 chaplains currently on active duty, Christian institutions endorse 97 percent.<sup>29</sup> The qualities of Christendom impact the postmodern civilian population and the postmodern active duty population. Seventy-eight percent of Keesler’s active duty population claim some form of Christianity as their religion of choice. Christianity dominates in the chapel because Christianity dominates in the civilian culture. Christendom exercises an “overweening influence”<sup>30</sup> on the Christian church and influences pastors who become chaplains.

The barriers a Christendom mode of ministry presents to postmodern civilians also presents to postmodern active duty. One such barrier is conformity. The USAF requires conformity in every area of an airman’s life. All airmen must wear a uniform, accomplish continuing education, pass an annual fitness test, comply with hair and grooming standards, and follow the orders of their superiors. Compliance is continually monitored and judged. One of the USAF core values is service before self, but postmodern individuals value individuality and diversity.

Spiritual fitness is completely voluntary. The USAF does not monitor or judge spiritual fitness, and airmen seeking spiritual health through the chapel are not obligated

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas Blase, briefing at the Chaplain Service Institute (Maxwell AFB, AL, September 19, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 9.

to continue seeking care if they encounter the barrier of conformity. The chapel can easily ignore the spiritual-but-not-religious airman in the same way an institution serving the majority can easily ignore the silent minority. Some airmen have walked away, as evidenced by the student spirituality survey. The chapel needs to become more missional to care for the spiritual needs of those who have walked away.

The chapel is Christian-centric, as evidenced by the preceding discussion. The USAF is the state and the chapel is the church. Being Christian-centric creates a barrier by inflating the importance of institutional traditions over the changing needs of individuals. The chapel sends the message that if individuals want to receive spiritual care, they must conform to Christianity.

### **The Keesler AFB Chapel**

The three factors that shape the chapel's religious activities are evidenced by the way the chapel utilizes its resources. Theoretically, the USAF Chaplaincy expands the freedom of religion into spirituality; however, the expansion is not done in practice as evidenced by the chapel's use of resources. Most spiritual care efforts are delivered in the form of Christian religious worship, rites, and education. The chapel ignores spiritual-but-not-religious airmen in the same way as an institution serving the majority can easily ignore the silent minority.

The chapel's priorities, which are established by the Wing Chaplain, demonstrate how the chapel ignores the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen. The Wing Chaplain has placed worship services at the top of the priority list followed by pastoral care, visitation,



and activities in the Fishbowl.<sup>31</sup> Five of the 6 worship opportunities currently offered by the chapel are exclusively Christian. The sixth worship opportunity is a Muslim prayer service offered on Friday nights at the Islamic center. The spiritual-but-not-religious airmen do not attend chapel worship, but they do participate in the Fishbowl's activities.

The chapel's use of funds is evidence that the chapel ignores spiritual-but-not-religious airmen.<sup>32</sup> The chapel obtains funds from two sources; appropriated funds, which are authorized from Congress, and non-appropriated funds, which are collected during religious worship. The non-appropriated budget for fiscal year 2007 was \$254,700, with \$224,810, or 88.26 percent, dedicated to Christian worship and religious education. The Fishbowl Student Center received only \$19,000, or 7.5 percent, of the non-appropriated budget. The appropriated budget for fiscal year 2007 was \$76,600, with \$40,600, or 53 percent, dedicated to Christian worship and religious education. The appropriated budget also spent \$1,500 on a prayer curtain for the Muslim prayer room. The chapel, in fiscal year 2007, spent a total of \$ 301,401 to support one particular religion, whose worship services were attended by an average of 537 people per weekend.

The square footage of facilities solely dedicated to religious worship is evidence that the chapel ignores spiritual-but-not-religious airmen. The USAF built five facilities on Keesler AFB for use by the chapel; the Triangle chapel, the Triangle Annex, the Larcher chapel, the Muslim prayer room, and the Hospital chapel. The total square

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<sup>31</sup> Patricia Gray, *Inbriefing for the 2007 Operational Readiness Inspection* (Biloxi, MS: Keesler AFB Chapel), 2007.

<sup>32</sup> Documents which contain chapel budget information are for official use only.

footage is 54,490<sup>33</sup>. The square footage designated by law exclusively for religious worship is 16,730, or 31 percent. The remaining square footage includes chapel offices, storage, kitchens, bathrooms, and fellowship spaces.

The chapel has ample resources to meet the religious needs of any Christian. The chapel has an Islamic prayer room for Muslims. The chapel maintains a list of civilian places of worship available off base for personnel of other religions. The chapel currently has nothing for the spiritual-but-not-religious airman, even though USAF Chaplain Service documents allow it. Chapter 2 argues that there are as many as 450 spiritual-but-not-religious students at Keesler; the silent minority.

### **Challenges**

Ministry to the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen requires a chaplain who is comfortable outside of traditional religions categories, making such ministry dependent on that chaplain. Chaplains may be deployed as much as 365 days out of a three or four-year assignment to Keesler AFB, and maintaining consistent spiritual care for spiritual-but-not-religious airmen can be difficult, unless two or more chaplains are involved.

The Fishbowl is an exception to some of this chapter's claims. The Fishbowl provides "median spaces"<sup>34</sup> for students to belong and connect. The Fishbowl is located in the middle of the student dorms and provides a place for the Christian chaplain to be missional and incarnational. The Fishbowl currently provides weekly recreational, non-religious activities, under the chapel's influence. Fishbowl activities connect students

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<sup>33</sup> Square footage information was obtained by actual measurements by the author.

<sup>34</sup> Myers, *The Search to Belong*, 120.

with each other and with chaplains, but there is no intentional effort to connect students with God or to discuss spirituality. The Fishbowl is the space in which spiritual conversations can take place.

Airmen are free to worship at a civilian church. Freedom to worship off base may seem to make declining chapel worship attendance less alarming; however, airmen who are in their first phase of training are not allowed to go off-base without special permission. The chapel is the only choice for many airmen. Spiritual-but-not-religious airmen will continue to stay away from the chapel unless the chapel adapts to their needs.

Spiritual care can occur in private counseling between a chaplain and an airman. Fishbowl chaplains conducted 1,740 counseling sessions in calendar year 2006.<sup>35</sup> Some airmen may find this one-on-one approach to be spirituality sufficient. Chaplains cannot reveal the content of counseling sessions due to confidentiality concerns; however, spirituality by definition includes connection with peers, which is not possible in a counseling session.

The Constitution and most of the other documents guiding the chapel are not going to change to become more spiritually-focused. All of the documents are heavily influenced by modern categories of spirituality, and the USAF is a modern institution that requires conformity. The USAF's view of spirituality requires conformity to a religious tradition. The USAF has little consideration for individual spirituality; however, USAF-specific documents contain language which authorizes the chapel to provide spiritual care outside of religious traditions. The chapel's tradition of providing religious activities does

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<sup>35</sup> Documents that contain chaplain counseling information are for official use.

not need to stop. A spiritual conversations gathering only requires adoption, not change.

Any chapel that adapts to an individual's spirituality will blaze a new trail.

### **Parallel Paths of the Religious Chapel and the Spiritual Airmen**

On a continuum between individual spirituality and organized religion, individual spirituality describes disciplines and habits to live an integrated, connected, and motivated life while organized religion prescribes and requires the disciplines and habits for a person to be integrated, connected, and motivated. The chapel's activities are supported by the Federal Government, which comes alongside the 238 approved institutions of religion, borrows ministers from those religions, and trains them to function in a pluralistic environment. The government builds chapels, which look very similar to traditional Christian church buildings, provides money, and trains pastors to be chaplains. The government provides guidance for the chapel in the form of written law. The government makes these resources available for chaplains as a resource for ministry to airmen. Resources are provided from the top down, while little consideration is given to the individual airman's wants and needs.

The chapel and spiritual-but-not-religious students take parallel paths on their spiritual journeys. Some students are interested in their spiritual health but seek spiritual care outside of organized religion. The chapel seeks to provide spiritual care through defined religions such as Christianity, Islam, or Judaism. The chapel provides ample resources to support spirituality when the individual seeking spiritual care conforms to a

particular religious group. The person who refuses conformity is isolated or at least presented with barriers.

Everyone has a spirituality. Some choose to conform their spirituality to a particular religion. By definition, the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen do not conform, and this excludes them from the chapel's resources. The spiritual-but-not-religious airmen, at a minimum, need a companion on their spiritual journey. The missional Christian chaplain can be that companion by incarnating into student culture as Jesus incarnated into His world. Spiritual conversations can provide such an incarnation.

The chapel's authoritative documents provide support for a non-religious approach to spirituality, but it has not happened in practice. The chapel could adapt to postmodern spirituality, but has not for at least three reasons.

First, it is easier to recycle than to innovate. Unlike a local church pastor, chaplains come and go quickly. Chaplains may move as often as every two to four years, and, during their tenure, chaplains can expect to deploy and go TDY for at least twelve months. The base population is also constantly rotating in and out. Chaplains have little time to embrace the context, listen to people's needs, construct a plan to meet the needs, seek approval for the plan, and implement the plan. The environment is too dynamic to plan very far ahead, but the USAF expects its chaplains to plan. Operating the same Christian worship and religious education programs year after year is easy, but it neglects local needs.

Large institutions with long traditions contain inertia, making innovation difficult. The chapel is intimately intertwined with the USAF and with 238 religious groups from

which it receives chaplains; however, the Christian chaplain as missionary, is agile enough to implement the spiritual care portion of the Chief of Chaplains mission.

Second, chaplains are not trained in postmodern spiritual care or postmodern culture, but by their respective religious denominations. Chaplains are required to attend the Chaplain Basic Course at the Air Force Chaplain Service Institute. AFCSI trains pastors to be military chaplains. The Chaplain Basic Course covers several of the world's religions, but not postmodernism.

The author spoke with a chaplain who taught at the AFCSI from 2005 until 2007. The conversation revealed difficulty in bringing postmodernism training into the classroom. Several teachers have tried to convince Chaplain Service leadership that chaplains need training in postmodern culture and spirituality without success. AFCSI has never offered significant training on postmodernism or postmodern spirituality.

Third, the USAF Chaplain Service, until the student spirituality survey, had no data upon which to base a postmodern method of ministry. The Keesler AFB chapel only surveys airmen who regularly attend chapel in its annual survey. The chapel assumes that those who attend worship are the only ones interested in spiritual health. The student spirituality survey revealed that there are many airmen who do not attend chapel but are interested in spiritual health.

Every airman is required to conform to the USAF through wearing a uniform, meeting physical fitness standards, speaking the language of military acronyms, and putting service before self.<sup>36</sup> The Christendom-influenced church, with its hierarchy,

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<sup>36</sup> Service before self is one of the Air Force's three core values.

dualism, and attractional worship also requires conformity. The church has become a human construction project that presents barriers to people who like Jesus, but not the church.<sup>37</sup> Jesus never meant for the church to become an institution but a group of missional followers who continue the Incarnation. The Incarnation does not require culture to conform to it; it conforms to culture.

Walls writes, “Christianity has no culturally fixed element”<sup>38</sup> as opposed to other religions such as Islam. Chapter 5 argues that Christianity is unique in that it must incarnate within its culture. “Christian faith must go on being translated, must continuously enter into vernacular culture and interact with it, or it withers and fades.”<sup>39</sup> Declining chapel attendance may be a result of the chapel dragging Christendom into the twenty-first century. Christianity, does not require conformity to an institution, only conformity to Jesus, who provides all that is needed for a person to be spiritually healthy.

Christianity is not an institutional religion, but became one in Christendom. Christianity is a relationship with Jesus that results in a transformed lifestyle of love. Christianity is not a religion with its own universal culture. Christianity is subject to culture and, in fact, must adapt to its culture to be effective. Christianity will distance itself from postmodern culture to the extent it presents itself as a fixed, objective religion with a static culture that requires conformity. “Crossing cultural boundaries has been the life blood of historic Christianity.”<sup>40</sup> It is time in the chapel that Christianity give up its

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<sup>37</sup> This resembles the title of Dan Kimball’s book *They Like Jesus But Not the Church*.

<sup>38</sup> Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 13.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

rights as an institution, cross the cultural boundary of religion, and adapt to its surrounding postmodern culture. A spiritual conversations gathering and an annual spirituality survey is one way to adapt, and will be described in Chapter 6.

### Summary

The chapel's emphasis on religious activities is inadequate to provide spiritual care for spiritual-but-not-religious airmen. The chapel values institution over relationship and conformity over diversity. Government documents, the chaplain commissioning process, the lingering influence of Christendom, and the way in which the chapel utilizes its resources demonstrate that the chapel's values are different from the values of the spiritual-but-not-religious student airmen.

Chapter 3 describes barriers to spiritual care created by the chapel's religious activities. In the USAF, being physically fit is required, but being spiritually fit is not. Airmen are free to improve or ignore their spiritual wellness. Religions can create barriers for spiritual-but-not-religious airmen, because they have different values. Spiritual-but-not-religious airmen value relationship and diversity over institution and conformity. Many airmen may desire to improve their spiritual wellness, but do not because of the barriers.

Chapter 2 shows that the Air Force exercises greater influence on the chapel's spiritual care efforts than do the needs of individual airmen. Spiritual care is structured from the top down, instead of from the bottom up. Spiritual-but-not-religious airmen have never been targeted in the chapel's annual needs survey. Instead, only those who attend



chapel are surveyed, creating a feedback loop which reinforces the chapel's emphasis on religious activities. The student spirituality survey revealed that as many as 450 spiritual-but-not-religious students are interested in improving their spiritual wellness if the chapel can adapt to postmodern spirituality. One way for the chapel to adapt is to offer a spiritual conversations gathering and accomplish an annual spirituality survey. The Keesler chapel already utilizes a median space<sup>41</sup> in the Fishbowl, where spiritual conversations can take place.

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<sup>41</sup> Myers, *The Search to Belong*, 130.

## CHAPTER 4

### BIBLICAL BASIS FOR MINISTRY TO AIRMEN

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.

—Luke 19:10

How can the Keesler Air Force Base Chapel provide spiritual care for spiritual-but-not-religious airmen? The chapel must embrace the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen by offering a spiritual conversations gathering and by conducting an annual spirituality survey. The gathering and survey are expressions of the missional and relational nature of the chapel's Christian community. The chapel's Christian community should act in ways which are consistent with its nature. The gathering and survey provide an intersection between the parallel journeys of the religious chapel and the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen. An intersection gives spiritual-but-not-religious students access to the chapel's spiritual care resources, and provides an opportunity for the chapel to influence the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen.

#### **The Model of Jesus**

##### God Is Missional and Relational

Relationship is part of God's nature because He has revealed Himself as a community of three persons. Father, Son, and Spirit form the Godhead in a triune

relationship. Grenz and Franke write, “God is a Trinitarian fellowship of love.”<sup>1</sup> God’s relational nature is expressed through creation and through His mission to restore creation.

Creation of humanity and human relationship is an expression of God’s relational nature. The Bible describes all creation as “good” (Gen. 1:31). God created human beings in His own image (Gen. 1:27) and made a perfect place for them. Adam and Eve were in a perfect relationship with the surrounding creation and with each other. “The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame” (Gen. 2:25). Adam and Eve’s naked relationship reflected God’s nature as a perfect community of three.

God is committed to growing communities of relationships. In Genesis, God tells the creatures of the air and water to multiply (Gen. 1:22), and the couple receives the same command (Gen. 1:28). Gender, one factor of creation, gives Adam and Eve reproductive abilities, and creation multiplies through Adam and Eve’s relationship.

God is conversational. Conversation forms and grows relationships. The creation story contains a divine monologue regarding Adam’s loneliness (Gen. 2:18), and conversations between God and the couple (Gen. 3:9f). Humanity has a divine-like ability to communicate because God wants conversation partners. Referring to the Trinity, Schwobel writes, “One of the most telling pictures of this view of God is given by Luther, who depicts the being of God as an eternal conversation, so that the sentence ‘God is conversation’ is true.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 202.

<sup>2</sup> Rupert Shortt, *God’s Advocates: Christian Thinkers in Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 89.

God is fully committed to having conversation partners. Genesis 3 depicts the disintegration of Adam and Eve's relationship with each other and with God. The couple's conversation is filled with blame and accusation which damages their relationships. The couple hides, attempting to avoid talking with God. Throughout, God remains patient, loving, and gracious. While looking for the couple God calls out, "Where are you?" (Gen. 2:9). God seeks all whose relationship with Him is damaged.

God patiently waits for humanity to fulfill His command to spread throughout the earth; however, humanity settles in Shinar (Gen. 11:2) and the text reveals humanity's resolve to disobey (Gen 11:4). The text also reveals the danger in allowing humanity to converse with each other while not listening to God. In response to the Babel defiance, God scatters humanity and confuses their language (Gen. 11:6-7). Babel's defiance leads the reader to a barren Sarai (Gen. 11:30).

God, throughout the Old Testament, demonstrates His mission by creating missionary partnerships. God speaks with Abram and calls him to go to an unknown place (Gen. 12:1). The four divine promises initiate a partnership with Abram, and reveal God's desire to have a community that reflects His Trinitarian fellowship of love.<sup>3</sup> The divine mission is to restore the Trinity-like fellowship which was lost in the Garden. Abram is God's first missionary.

God continues His mission through a conversation with Moses at a burning bush. Moses will utilize ten conversations with Pharaoh to free Israel, each time exposing God's power. During the wilderness wanderings, God offers Israel an exclusive invitation

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<sup>3</sup> Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 202.

to enter a relationship with Himself and to bless the entire world. In Exodus 19:5-6, God says, “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” Israel will become a living offer of relationship with God to the rest of the world, fulfilling the divine promise to Abram. God is committed to fulfilling His mission through Israel and eventually through Jesus and His Church.

### Jesus Is Missional and Relational

God sent Jesus into the world because He loves the world and is committed to restoring relationship with humanity (John 3:16). Jesus is the solution to the problem of restoring humanity’s relationship with God and with each other. God will not abandon His mission to create conversation partners. Jesus extended His mission to the twelve disciples and to the church. The Christian chaplain, in the same way, must continue the mission of Jesus to the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen. Jesus is the model for the Christian chaplain as Jesus is the model for any Christian.

The Incarnation<sup>4</sup> is an expression of a missional God. Jesus could have come to earth in a powerful way, but He came as fully divine and fully human. Jesus, keeping His unique identity (John 5:18-19), gave up His rights and privileges as God (Phil. 2:6-11), and became empty so that He could influence culture from the inside, not to conquer culture from the outside.

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<sup>4</sup> Capital “I” distinguishes Jesus’ Incarnation from the continuing incarnation of His followers.

Kenosis precedes cultural influence. Jesus related to those He engaged, whether religious leader, Samaritan, Gentile, or common Jew, because He emptied Himself. Jesus was part of His culture, not separate from it. He was the son of a common carpenter (Matt. 13:55), and lived almost anonymously for thirty years before beginning His public ministry. Listening to culture takes time and effort, and the chapel must listen to the culture of the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen, as Jesus listened to His culture. The chapel already exists in the airman's culture, but there is no process to listen. An annual spirituality survey targeted to the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen provides a process to listen.

Jesus is missional. Luke 19:10 captures the mission of Jesus; "The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost." Jesus is the incarnation of God's search for Adam and Eve who were hiding in the Garden (Gen. 3:9). The action verb in Luke 19:10 is "came." Jesus' mission required Him to go. Jesus moved from His home in heaven to the earth, a foreign place. Jesus did not employ an attractional method of fulfilling His mission. The chapel's Christian community must find ways to move toward the marginal spiritual-but-not-religious airmen<sup>5</sup> in the same way Jesus moved from heaven to earth.

The purpose of Jesus' move, according to Luke 19:10, was "to seek and to save." "Seek and save" express the aim of the action denoted by the finite verb."<sup>6</sup> Luke did not use the verbal infinitive "to save" in a soteriological sense, but in a restorative sense. To

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<sup>5</sup> The term "marginal" is preferred over the term "lost," which perpetuates modernity's dualism.

<sup>6</sup> H. E. Dana and Julius Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto, ON: MacMillan, 1957), 214.

be saved is to be restored in relationship with God, others, and the world. For example, Zacchaeus experienced a personal conversion and a public conversion that included relationships with his “house” (Luke 19:9), those he “cheated” (Luke 19:8), and the “poor” (Luke 19:8) who benefited from his generosity. Zacchaeus’ salvation not only had a personal impact, but one that impacted all the relationships in his life: God, family, clients, and community.

Jesus is relational. Jesus’ efforts targeted the lost. Jesus did not seek out the rich and powerful people of His day, but befriended the marginalized. Jesus’ life continued God’s mission to restore all humanity including Jew and Gentile (Luke 4:14-30). Jesus demonstrated this understanding by lovingly engaging those whom culture ignored, abandoned, or outcast.

The marginalized at Keesler AFB are the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen. If Christian chaplains are serious about fulfilling God’s call, and if the chapel’s Christian community is serious about following Jesus, then they must view themselves as missionaries who are called to go to the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen. God sent Jesus, now Jesus sends the Church to continue God’s mission of restoring relationship. A spiritual conversations gathering held at the Fishbowl provides an opportunity for the chapel to go into the context of the spiritual-but-not-religious airman and continue God’s mission.

Jesus spoke with and restored a friendless lame man (John 5:1-7), an unemployed blind man (Mark 10:46-52), and a dangerous, demon-possessed man (Mark 5:1-13). Jesus befriended traitorous and despised tax collectors. Jesus was the dinner guest of

Zacchaeus, a “chief tax collector” (Luke 19:2), and called Levi to be one of His disciples (Luke 5:27-28). Jesus healed the servant of a Roman Centurion (Matt. 8:5-13), a representative of Gentile occupiers of the holy land. Jesus interacted with the people whom His culture ignored, abandoned, or outcast so often that He was accused of being a friend of sinners, a glutton and a drunkard (Luke 7:34), and demon-possessed (Mark 3:22).

Jesus’ relationship with the marginalized offended the Pharisees because eating with someone conveyed acceptance. Gempf writes, “For a first century Jew, having dinner with someone was making a statement about acceptance and about religious fellowship. Supper was not just sustenance; supper was spirituality. Doing lunch was doing theology.”<sup>7</sup> Jesus, affirming the Pharisees’ accusation, responds by telling parables about lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son (Luke 15). The parables reveal that God, who lovingly seeks the marginal, rejoices when a person is restored. The parables explain that God’s mission is to restore all humanity, no matter the categories in which they fit. Jesus’ life reveals that God is interested in the marginalized.

Jesus and the Pharisees wanted humanity restored, but they utilized different processes. The Pharisees proclaimed conformity to religious law as a prerequisite for God’s acceptance, and their requirement of conformity created a chasm similar to the modern-day Christian subculture.<sup>8</sup> Jesus, on the other hand, demonstrated God’s love toward the marginal people so that His relationship with them would sensitize them to

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<sup>7</sup> Conrad H. Gempf, *Mealtime Habits of the Messiah: 40 Encounters with Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 133.

<sup>8</sup> Kimball, *They Like Jesus But Not the Church*, 236.



God's love and presence. Jesus' embodiment approach blurred the line between the godly and the godless.

To the extent the chapel's Christian community continues its religious-goods-and-services approach to ministry, the Gospel will not influence those who are not attracted to the chapel. An attractional method of ministry places the chapel at the center and creates a Christian sub-culture to which the spiritual-but-not-religious airman must conform before they can belong. God's mission compels the chapel to be missional, enter the world of the spiritual-but-not-religious airman, and demonstrate God's love to them. Offering a spiritual conversations gathering is one way the chapel enters the world of the spiritual-but-not-religious airman, and influences their spiritual formation.

Jesus was conversational and adapted His conversation to His conversation partners. Jesus spoke to the religious leaders with religious language regarding ceremonial cleaning, tithing, and synagogue seating protocol (Luke 11:39-42). Jesus utilized subjects familiar to the religious leaders, such as Scripture (Matt. 9:13; 12:3-7, 40; 19:4-5, 8; 22:44; Mark 12:26-27), current religious events (Matt. 21:25), familiar objects (Matt. 22:19), parables (Luke 10:30-37), and their own lifestyle (Luke 13:15; 14:5; 16:19-31). Jesus incarnated His conversation into the religious world so that He could influence religious people.

Jesus encountered a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (John 4:1-42) and allowed her to guide the conversation. She answered Jesus' request for a drink with a reminder about no-contact rules between Jews and Samaritans. Jesus, understanding her spirituality, twice guided the conversation toward His mission; once using water, and

once using the shared history between Jews and Samaritans (John 4:10, 13-14). The woman abruptly shifted the conversation to a religious worship dispute. Jesus followed, replying based on her understanding of worship, but taught her about authentic worship. The woman switched the conversation to the coming of the Jewish Messiah. Jesus followed, replying that He is the Messiah. Jesus incarnated His conversation into the Samaritan world so that He could influence Samaritans.

Jesus engaged a Gentile woman who asked Him to heal her daughter (Mark 7:24-30, Matt. 15:21-28). Jesus and the woman understood that His mission was first for the Jews, then for the Gentiles. The widely understood relationship between the Gentiles and the Jews provided a basis for Jesus' refusal. The woman's submissive reply revealed a surprising aspect of her spirituality; faith in God. Jesus changed His mind and granted her request. Jesus incarnated His conversation into the Gentile world, so that He could influence Gentiles.

Jesus talked about spirituality in ways that common people could understand. Jesus utilized common wedding protocols, wine storage, and garment repair knowledge to explain His disciples' lack of fasting (Mark 2:19-22, Luke 5:33-39). He used images such as salt, light, clothing, thieves, money, birds, flowers, wood products, dogs, pigs, pearls, bread, fish, snakes, gates, fruit, and construction practices to teach about God's kingdom (Matt. 5:1-7:29). Jesus' spiritual conversations considered His audience's life context.

Events, which took place in the normal course of life, inspired Jesus' conversations. The weather provided Jesus with an opportunity to teach his disciples

about faith (Luke 8:22-25). A widow's offering demonstrated commitment to God (Mark 12:41). Jesus allowed a woman, who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years (Mark 5:25), to interrupt His trek to Jairus' home. Jesus did not teach from a teaching plan or program, but as life presented opportunities.

Jesus' conversations often required the hearer's participation. Jesus made statements, told stories and parables, and asked questions that confused the hearer (John 7:35-36, 43; 8:22, 27; 10:24). Confusion requires that a person participate in order to understand, and Jesus wanted people to participate in their spirituality. Participation sometimes requires conversation, and sometimes requires action (Luke 5:12-15; 8:39; 17:14). Hirsch writes, "He spoke in confusing riddles (parables) that evoked a spiritual search in the hearers. Nowhere does he give three-point devotional sermons that cover all the bases."<sup>9</sup> Authentic Christian spirituality is not for spectators but requires full participation.

The spiritual conversations gathering provides an opportunity for spiritual-but-not-religious airmen to participate in their spirituality. Unless the spiritual-but-not-religious airman comes to chapel, they have no regular way to engage Christians with their spirituality. The spirituality survey reveals that spiritual-but-not-religious airmen do talk to their peers about spirituality, but not to chaplains nor to chapel participants. A spiritual conversations gathering, led by a Christian chaplain, gives the spiritual-but-not-religious airman the ability to explore their spirituality with a chaplain's guidance. The

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<sup>9</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 44.

chaplain will need to adapt his or her conversation to the airmen as Jesus adapted His conversation to the Gentiles, Samaritans, and Pharisees He encountered.

The content of Jesus' conversations often involved the kingdom of God. The Gospels record Jesus speaking about the Kingdom of God<sup>10</sup> or the kingdom of Heaven a total of seventy-four times.<sup>11</sup> Jesus compared the kingdom of God to something earthly fourteen times and Jesus said that the kingdom of God is near ten times. Kingdom of God was important from the beginning of Jesus' public ministry (Matt. 4:17, Mark 1:15, Luke 4:43, John 3:3). The Synoptic Gospel writers summed up Jesus' message as "Repent, for the kingdom of God is near" (Matt. 4:17, Mark 1:15, Luke 4:43).

Jesus not only taught about and demonstrated the kingdom of God, but Jesus was and is the kingdom of God. Sweet writes, "The kingdom of God *is* the presence of Jesus."<sup>12</sup> The central topic of the spiritual conversations gathering will be the kingdom of God in the life of the spiritual-but-not-religious airman. Jesus is present in the life of the airman, and the chaplain's guidance can assist airmen to detect Jesus' presence and activity.

Jesus completed His mission to restore God's relationship with humanity. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection transformed the boundary separating heaven from earth into a two-way path of relationship, and Jesus' life revealed God's love and acceptance to

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<sup>10</sup> Mark, Luke, and John utilize "The kingdom of God" and Matthew utilizes "The kingdom of heaven."

<sup>11</sup> Edward Goodrick and John Kohlenberger, *The NIV Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 625-6.

<sup>12</sup> Leonard I. Sweet, *The Three Hardest Words in the World to Get Right* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2006), 52.

humanity. Jesus' suffering, death, and interment allowed the Godhead to experience the full range of human life, including the painful separation of a father from a son. Lewis writes:

God's very being as Trinitarian community has on Easter Saturday been delivered up to contradiction and falsification: the Godness of the Father who gave up the only Son; the Godness of the Son who gave himself away; the Godness of the Spirit who, it seems, allowed death to sever the divine fellowship's eternal bonds of unity.<sup>13</sup>

Jesus' death carried the full range of human suffering into the Trinity where it was swallowed and victoriously overcome in the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:54).

Jesus' resurrection is a hopeful demonstration of God's determination and power to restore relationship with a disconnected humanity. God can overcome anything if He can overcome death. The marginalized people can be restored to the life God intended in the Garden. Postmodern individuals are not sure where to turn for their spirituality, since there is no longer trust in the Church's salvation-history meta-narrative.<sup>14</sup> The spiritual conversations gathering will nudge the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen toward devotion to Jesus by offering the hope provided by the Gospel.

### Making Disciples and the Missional Church

Mission is inherent in the Church's identity, and a response to God's sending initiative. Throughout the Bible, God calls people such as Abraham, Israel, Jesus, the disciples, and Paul to go. The Church is the missional expression of God on earth. Missional is not merely an activity of the Church, but describes a group of Christians who

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<sup>13</sup> Alan E. Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 324-5.

<sup>14</sup> Leonard I. Sweet, *The Three Hardest Words in the World to Get Right* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2006), 19; Sweet says that the idea of metanarrative has "fallen out of fashion."

accept their calling as the sent people of God in their present context. God's mission is to restore relationship with all humanity. God, through Jesus, calls the Church to partner with Him to accomplish His mission (John 20:21) in the local context. The missional church listens to the Spirit, the Scriptures, and tradition, and it listens to the local context in order to find ways to embody Jesus within that context.

Jesus trained, empowered, and sent His disciples to continue demonstrating God's love and presence with the marginal (Mark 6:7-13, Matt. 10; 28:18-20, Luke 10:1-17, John 20:21-22, Acts 1:8.). Israel's religious leaders refused to scatter to the margins and participate in God's restorative mission. Instead, they built a religion that required that a person conform prior to acceptance by God. Judaism viewed itself as God's gatekeeper, and Jesus opened the gate through the Incarnation and exposed God's love for all.

On the Day of Pentecost the third person of the Trinity came to earth to guide and empower the Church to go to the ends of the earth. The expression of God and Jesus' missional identity is in and through the Church. God's mission has now become the mission of the Church. God wants to restore lives to increase His conversation partners.

The chapel's Christian community is part of the Christian Church and is commissioned to continue God's mission at Keesler AFB. The postmodern, spiritual-but-not-religious airmen at Keesler AFB are part of a culture which is marginal to the chapel. As Jesus created a path to the marginal, so the chapel must create a path to the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen. A spiritual needs survey and a spiritual conversations gathering can provide a missional path for the chaplain to incarnate into the culture of the spiritual-

but-not-religious airman. “To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God’s love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love.”<sup>15</sup>

### **A Spiritual Conversations Gathering Continues Jesus’ Mission**

The Keesler AFB chapel’s Christian community must become more missional and relational toward the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen. God’s mission is to restore relationship with all humanity, creating conversation partners. Jesus continued God’s mission by demonstrating God’s love for all people, and by providing a two-way path of relationship between God and humanity. Jesus commissioned the church to continue God’s mission, and left the Incarnation as a model of engagement as the Church crosses cultural boundaries.

A spiritual conversations gathering for spiritual-but-not-religious airmen continues Jesus’ mission. As Jesus engaged the marginalized people of His day, the chapel must engage the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen. The closest and most ignored cross-cultural group for the chapel’s Christian community is the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen. The chapel is attractional, modern, and more religious than spiritual. The spiritual-but-not-religious airmen are not attracted to the chapel because they are postmodern and more spiritual than religious. The chapel’s Christian community, if it wants to follow its Lord, must missionally engage the marginalized people of its culture; those who are lost and are in need of a restored relationship with God. The spiritual-but-

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<sup>15</sup> David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* American Society of Missiology Series, no. 16 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 389-390.

not-religious airmen are such marginal people. When chaplains engage the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen, they “join Jesus in expressing God’s love for the whole world.”<sup>16</sup>

A spiritual conversations gathering provides an opportunity to be relational, as Jesus was relational. Spirituality is the common ground between the chapel and the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen. The spiritual-but-not-religious airmen are interested in spirituality and the Christian chaplain is interested in Christian spirituality. Spirituality is the point of intersection. Conversation about spirituality will create and grow a relationship between the chaplain and the airman, and relationships lead to influence.

The topic of spiritual conversations will be centered around God’s activity in airmen’s lives in the same way Jesus’ conversations centered on the nearness of the kingdom of God. God’s prevenient grace makes possible the presence of Jesus in the lives of every airman. “*Everyone* is in the process of spiritual formation!”<sup>17</sup> God’s presence is good news to postmodern individuals who are interested in spirituality and relationships. The Christian chaplain can be a partner with God as He works to restore relationship through Jesus, and create conversations partners. Within the spiritual conversations gathering “[T]he Spirit provides the means for us to participate in this divine conversation—because it is the Spirit who communicates to God’s created conversation partners what he overhears in the dialog between the Father and the Son.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 114.

<sup>17</sup> M. Robert Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 23.

<sup>18</sup> Shortt, *God’s Advocates*, 89.



The spiritual conversations gathering intersects the postmodern individual's interest in spirituality with Christian disciple making. A postmodern spirituality, defined in chapter 2, views spirituality in terms of integration between inner values and outward behavior, in terms of a connection with God, others, and the world, and in terms of motivation to face life's challenges. Christianity views spiritual health in terms of formation into the image of Christ. The Spirit of God, who is already present in the lives of the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen, provides everything necessary for a person to be spiritually healthy. The spiritual-but-not-religious airman who listens to the Spirit and follows Jesus will find a connection with God, others, and the world, motivation to face life's challenges, and power to live a life of integrity.

### **Conclusion**

Jesus' life and ministry serve as a model for the church to fulfill God's mission to restore relationship with humanity. The body of Christ seeking and embracing the lost is the essence of the Church's missional identity. Jesus commissioned and empowered the Church to continue His mission by making disciples and scattering to all the nations of the earth. The chapel's Christian community acts with integrity when it seeks and embraces those who are disconnected from God.

A spirituality survey fulfills the mission of the chapel's Christian community by seeking airmen who are spiritual-but-not-religious. Such airmen may be disconnected from God. A spiritual conversations gathering of spiritual-but-not-religious airmen embraces such airmen, expresses God's love to them, and begins the disciple-making

process. A spirituality survey and a spiritual conversations gathering provide a way for the chapel's Christian community to fulfill its mission and be the body of Christ.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE CHURCH: THE INCARNATION CONTINUES

Crossing cultural boundaries has been the life blood of historic Christianity.

—Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*

How can the Keesler Air Force Base Chapel provide spiritual care for spiritual-but-not-religious airmen? The chapel must embrace the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen by offering a spiritual conversations gathering and by conducting an annual spirituality survey. In order for the Church to continue the incarnation of Jesus, it must cross cultural boundaries. A cultural boundary exists between the religious chapel and the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen. Crossing cultural boundaries is a normative practice in the Church, and a spiritual conversations gathering and annual spirituality survey will provide the chapel's Christian community with incarnational engagement with spiritual-but-not-religious airmen. A spiritual conversations gathering can enable spiritual-but-not-religious airmen to access spiritual care and provide opportunities for the Christian chaplain to interest the airmen in Jesus.

#### **The Ancient Church: Following the Model of Jesus**

Crossing cultural boundaries is a normative practice in the Church because Jesus crossed the greatest cultural boundary: the boundary between heaven and earth. Jesus'

life, death, interment, and resurrection transformed the boundary between God and humanity into a two-way path of relationship. Jesus' work potentially removed all boundaries, cultural or otherwise (Eph 2:14-18).

While on earth, Jesus crossed human-made cultural boundaries and embraced those he engaged. For example, Jesus crossed an E2<sup>1</sup> cultural distance when he spoke to the Samaritan woman. "Jesus did not deny this profound difference, but accepted it and transcended it by pointing out the human, cultural limitations of both the Jewish and the Samaritan modes of worship. He spoke to her heart and bypassed the cultural differences."<sup>2</sup>

Crossing cultural boundaries is a normative practice in the Church because Jesus commissioned the ancient church to go to all nations.<sup>3</sup> The Acts commission lists areas of increasing cultural difference, from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Jesus referred to geographical distance and cultural distance.<sup>4</sup> Jerusalem and Judea were culturally close to the disciples. Samaria was culturally near, and the ends of the earth were culturally far. Jesus' worldview considers all cultures as one unified creation in need of restoration.

Crossing cultural boundaries is a normative practice in the Church because the ancient church crossed cultural boundaries. Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, empowered

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<sup>1</sup> Missiologist Ralph Winters provides a way to identify cultural distance. E1, E2, and E3 refer to close, near, and far cultures, respectively. See James Dixon Douglas, *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization Lausanne, Switzerland*, Official Reference Volume: Papers and Responses (Minneapolis: World Wide, 1975), 213-237.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>3</sup> Matt 28:18-20 and Luke 24:47 refer to "all nations," Mark 16:15 refers to "all creation," and Acts 1:8 states, "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." In John 20:21 Jesus sends His disciples without a specific destination.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas, *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, 217.

the ancient church to cross cultural boundaries. At Pentecost, the Spirit enabled people from all nations (Acts 2:4-12) to hear the Gospel in their own language.<sup>5</sup> The ancient church simultaneously crossed close, near, and far cultural boundaries. God embraced a linguistically pluralistic Jerusalem so that the disciples could bring the Gospel story to the world.

Persecution (Acts 5-7) propelled the ancient church out of Jerusalem across cultural boundaries. Some disciples scattered to Samaria and Judea (Acts 8:1). Philip went to Samaria (Acts 8:5), where an angel and the Spirit (Acts 8:26, 29, 39) empowered him to cross the cultural boundary between himself and an Ethiopian. The Spirit pulled the ancient church away from the E1 culture of Jerusalem toward the E3 culture of the ends of the earth.

Gentile conversions presented a new cultural boundary to the ancient church. Reports of Peter baptizing Gentiles reached the Church at Jerusalem (Acts 10:45, 11:1-3). Unknown Jewish believers from Cyprus and Greece shared the Gospel with Greek-speaking people in Antioch (Acts 11:19-20). Jewish converts from Judea visited Antioch proclaiming that Gentile Christians should first become Jews (Acts 15:1). The Jerusalem council decided that Gentiles could convert without first becoming Jews (Acts 15:23-29). The council embraced the Gentile Christians and allowed them to find their own way with minimal requirements. The council's decision provided the Gentile world with E1 witnesses. Had the Jerusalem council forced the Gentiles to convert to Judaism, the Gentiles would have become E2 with respect to their own culture, separating them from

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<sup>5</sup> Acts 2:6, also repeated in verses 8, 11, 14, and 37.

their own people. The council's decision reflected the non-dualistic "world-view of Jesus the Messiah."<sup>6</sup> God made no distinction between people (Acts 15:9).

Crossing cultural boundaries is a normative practice in the Church because cultures are dynamic. Indigenous E1 converts have more influence on a culture than foreign E2 missionaries. For example, when Paul visits Athens in Acts 17, he crosses from his Jewish culture into a Gentile culture of pluralistically religious philosophers.

Paul begins by flattering his audience, appealing to their interest in novel ideas (Acts 17:22-23). Paul finds their inscription to an unknown god and utilizes this as the starting point to share the Gospel. The philosophers detect God, but do not know who He is. God has already been to Athens. Paul does not begin by judging them, but by being conversationally incarnational. Then Paul shares the truth about the unknown God they worship. The philosophers would not respond to Jewish scripture so Paul appeals to their knowledge of creation. He finds common ground in their spirituality, revealing what they do not know without criticizing their beliefs. Paul sites verses from an indigenous poet that his audience would understand. Paul had a mixed response. Such "cross-cultural diffusion"<sup>7</sup> has been necessary for Christianity to spread.

In Acts 21, the Jerusalem council summons Paul. When he tells the council what God was doing among the Gentiles, the council tells Paul to look at the more spectacular Jewish converts in Jerusalem who were zealous for the Jewish law. Paul's successes seemed like a "sideline"<sup>8</sup> to the Jerusalem church. The day would come when there

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<sup>6</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 12.

<sup>7</sup> Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, 67.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 32

would be no Jerusalem church, no Jewish state, and no temple. The Jewish model of Christianity would eventually be swept away, but Paul and the unnamed missionaries to Antioch kept Christianity alive through the Gentiles.

Eventually the center of Christianity moved out of the Jewish world into the Gentile world. Walls writes, “The Christian story is serial; its center moves from place to place. No one church or place or culture owns it.”<sup>9</sup> Cultures are dynamic. An incarnation of the Gospel occurs within culture. Successful transmission of the Gospel depends on an understanding of and adaption to the culture’s metaphors, languages, and images. A static incarnation of the Gospel becomes meaningless in a dynamic culture. When culture changes significantly the incarnation of the Gospel must adapt. The next section demonstrates that the Christendom-influenced, modern American church generally has not adapted to postmodern culture, and has, therefore, created a barrier between itself and culture.

### **The Modern American Church: Following the Influence of Christendom**

In the contemporary world, as in the first century, pluralism and globalization brings many cultures and sub-cultures together.<sup>10</sup> Within a typical large American city, there are Christians mixed in with a variety of religions living in close proximity to each other. From the standpoint of a local church, the mission fields are no longer geographically foreign, they are in the backyard. Pluralism and the dynamic nature of postmodern culture require the Church to cross cultural boundaries in order to fulfill its

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>10</sup> This section contains broad generalizations in order to show where the modern western church and the chapel’s Christian community have gone wrong.

mission. The problem is that the modern western church still operates in “Christendom mode.”<sup>11</sup> The lingering influence of Christendom motivates the western church to avoid crossing cultural borders.

In Western Christendom, the normative practice of crossing cultural borders slowed because “The nature of the church began to shape the mission of the church rather than mission giving shape to the church—a subtle but crucial change.”<sup>12</sup> The Church achieved social status, formed into an institution, and began developing professional clergy to care for the institution. Social status and the delay of the eschaton brought more emphasis onto the form of the Church than onto the mission of the Church. As the Church moved away from the “edge of chaos”<sup>13</sup> by seeking equilibrium, it lost some of its “spiritual energy.”<sup>14</sup> Instead of following the incarnational model of Jesus, the Christendom Church adopted the colonial model of its benefactor, the Roman Empire. Today, Christendom no longer exists, but the modern western church, including the chapel’s Christian community acts as if Christendom is alive and well.

### The Attractional Church

The modern American church avoids crossing cultural boundaries because Christendom changed the Church’s relationship with culture. In Christendom the leadership of a disintegrating Roman Empire turned to the Church for support. Lesslie

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<sup>11</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 64.

<sup>12</sup> Robinson and Smith, *Invading Secular Space*, 46.

<sup>13</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 258.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



Newbigin writes, “When the old classical worldview lost its confidence and disintegrated, it was perhaps inevitable that the ruling power would turn to the Church as the integrating power for the new social order.”<sup>15</sup> The State gradually drew the Church from the margins of culture, to the center. Culture changed from being the embedding context<sup>16</sup> of the Gospel to a co-equal of the Gospel. Culture became Christian culture.

The ancient Church boldly scattered from Jerusalem with the subversive message, “Jesus is Lord,” resulting in persecution. The Church often paid a heavy price for crossing cultural boundaries with the Gospel. Spreading the subversive message of Christianity was risky and chaotic, until the Emperors began to look upon Christianity with favor.<sup>17</sup>

Constantine issued the Edict of Milan in A.D. 313, granting religious toleration to all religions. The State looked to the Church to help with various State functions. The sixth-century Church took over some of the functions for which society had been accustomed to look to the state. In exchange, the State gradually looked upon the Church with more favor. In AD 392, Theodosius made Christianity the sole legal religion in the Empire, creating Christendom. Instead of scattering to the risky margins, the western

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<sup>15</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 223.

<sup>16</sup> Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 130.

<sup>17</sup> Hirsch discusses how the efforts of Constantine created Christendom. Christendom “homogenized culture” which achieved some stability for the church. With the Church’s assumption that every citizen of the Empire was born Christian, there was less of a need for missionary efforts. Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 58-62.

Church settled at the safe center and become attractional. Once Christendom made Christianity safe, there was no desire to take risks by going cross culture.<sup>18</sup>

Once at the center, incarnation solidified into a static, hierarchical institution, which was meaningful only to E1 people. Creativity and listening to culture were no longer necessary because mission followed ecclesiology. Efforts turned from incarnating the Gospel across cultures, to self-preservation. The Church generally lost the “missional-incarnational impulse”<sup>19</sup> and with it the skills for E2 evangelism.

The modern church is largely attractional, placing little effort in listening to culture. Morganthaller asserts that modern Christians are a “narcissistic subculture,”<sup>20</sup> explaining that less than 1 percent of Christians have shared their faith recently, and 91 percent of seekers say Christians are not sensitive to their needs. The modern church has insulated itself from culture, creating a mini-Christendom, hoping that by tweaking interior church activities the world will enter and hear the Gospel. The modern church acts as if culture is Christian culture.

The modern church, favoring the “amusement impulse”<sup>21</sup> over the missional-incarnational impulse, has adopted marketing methods of consumer culture and ignored Jesus’ mission. Douglas writes:

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<sup>18</sup> Hirsch discusses the transition of the Church from the margins of society to its center as one factor of Christendom. Once all citizens are assumed Christian, the need for risky missions is diminished. Attractional methods of ministry replace mission. Hirsch discusses how the attractional methods of “Christendom mode” are ineffective when culture is no longer homogenous. *Ibid.*, 19-62.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>20</sup> Morganthaller, *Worship Evangelism*, 27.

<sup>21</sup> Robinson and Smith, *Invading Secular Space*, 32.

Present-day American Christians can wait forever in their cozy, middle-class pews for the world to come to Christ and join them. But unless they adopt E2 methods and both go out after these people and help them found their own churches, evangelism in America will face, and is already facing, steadily diminishing returns.<sup>22</sup>

### The Dualistic Church

The modern American church generally avoids crossing cultural boundaries because Christendom exchanged the messianic world-view of Jesus for territorial dualism. In Christendom, the Church embraces the State's dualistic view of the world. The State saw the world in terms of territory, occupied by either an enemy or ally. In the same way marriage partners influence each other, the State influenced the Church to see the world in terms of holy or pagan.

As the Church institutionalized, it built buildings within which to worship, and ordained clergy to lead worship. Dualism brought the Eucharist table into the sanctuary, separating worship from public life. Instead of celebrating Christian life in the public culture, as Jesus and the ancient Church did, worship became a building-centric escape from secular culture. Christianity became a private affair, "a religion of quiet moments in quiet places."<sup>23</sup>

In contrast, Jesus' example demonstrates a "whole-of-life spirituality"<sup>24</sup> based on the monotheism of the Old Testament. The Shema expresses this monotheism by claiming that all of life is under God's rule. God loves all people and governs over all

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<sup>22</sup> Douglas, *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, 222.

<sup>23</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 223.

<sup>24</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 21.

earthly affairs. Jesus demonstrates this when He developed relationships with those whom His culture isolated, abandoned, or ignored. Jesus was accused of being a friend of sinners because He developed relationships with everyone. The ancient Church believed that all creation fell under the Lordship of Jesus.

The modern American church has inherited Christendom's dualism. The Church constructs sanctuaries for worship, separating themselves from culture. The Church hires professional clergy to do sacred ministry while the congregation is involved in the secular world. Churches view people in terms of Christian and non-Christian. Individuals who desire to belong to a church must overcome a Christian subculture, which the Church creates with its dualistic perspective. They must believe before they can belong.

The liberal church's response to modernity has fueled Christendom's dualism. The liberal church gave in to modernity and taught that religious feeling is most important in the Christian life, further privatizing faith. In modernity, faith increasingly became private opinion while science was public fact. Modernity enabled the church's dualism and dualism made the Church increasingly irrelevant to modern culture.

Postmodernity brings an increasing rate of cultural change. Without the protection of the State, dualism drives modern church to seek safety by being protective, insulating itself from change. Just when the Church should interact with and listen to culture, it seeks protection from culture. Walls writes, "Christian faith must go on being translated, must continuously enter into vernacular culture and interact with it, or it withers and fades."<sup>25</sup> The Church's engagement with culture must change as culture changes. A

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<sup>25</sup> Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, 29.

protective posture grounds Christian faith more in the institution and its traditions than in Christ. Churches withdraw into “judgmental isolation”<sup>26</sup> from culture, making Christians critical of culture. Postmodern individuals often describe Christians as being judgmental and critical.<sup>27</sup>

Postmodern culture requires that the Church return to the messianic worldview of Jesus, which views all creation under God’s rule. Culture is neither good nor bad, but the “embedding context”<sup>28</sup> for the Church. Postmodern individuals are looking for a spirituality that integrates all aspects of life. The Church has made spirituality private, but within postmodern culture there is a “volcano of spirituality.”<sup>29</sup>

### The Universal Church

The modern American church avoids crossing cultural boundaries because Christendom emphasized universality<sup>30</sup> over mission. The Church embraced the Empire’s idea of universality which was the result of “the interaction of Christian faith and tradition with the dominant cultural norms.”<sup>31</sup> Rather than incarnating in order to transform culture, the Church attempted to create a doctrinally universal Christian culture. Orthodoxy took the place of orthopraxy. Creating a universal Christian culture

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<sup>26</sup> Eddie Gibbs, *Churchnext: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 40.

<sup>27</sup> Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 96f.

<sup>28</sup> Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 130.

<sup>29</sup> Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*, 19.

<sup>30</sup> Generally, the institutional church ignored local cultural differences in order to create a universal, one-size-fits-all Christianity. The establishment and spread of Catholicity became more important than resourcing local incarnations of the Gospel.

<sup>31</sup> Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, 36.

took the place of mission. The Christendom church replaced its missional identity with doctrinal identity.

The Church's first major attempt to unite orthodoxy took place when Constantine assembled and presided over the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. For the first time a Roman Emperor exercised imperial authority over an ecclesiastical council. The council met to unify Christological belief for all of Christendom against the Arian Controversy, producing the Nicene Creed. The Council of Constantinople, presided over by Theodosius, revised the Creed in AD 381. Between AD 325 and AD 737, seven ecumenical councils met to unify Christian belief and defend Christendom against heresies such as Nestorianism, monophysitism, monothelitism, and iconoclasm. "Never was that unity fully realized."<sup>32</sup>

The Church's shift away from mission to description attempted to create a universal ahistorical and acultural doctrine, a "disembodied, abstract essence."<sup>33</sup> The Church, motivated by its marriage to the Emperor, replaced the risky, narrative-based, subversive message of "Jesus is Lord" with a safe, neutral, universal message. Universal orthodoxy became the litmus test for entrance into the Church. If individuals believed correctly, they could belong.

Christendom's emphasis on universal orthodoxy fueled the conservative church's response to modernity. The conservative church adopted the methods of modernity to defend itself against modernity, and relied on foundationalism. The conservative church

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<sup>32</sup> Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, 187.

<sup>33</sup> Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 84.

turned Christianity into propositional truths, reducing revelation to reason, a “tactical retreat.”<sup>34</sup> The Bible and the modern church increasingly moved to the margins of culture.

Postmodernity requires that the Church’s orthodoxy be grounded in orthopraxy. “Christians are called to live the story, not restate it in the form of universalized propositions.”<sup>35</sup> Christians in different cultures will embody the Gospel differently. There is one Gospel, but many different embodiments of that Gospel. If the Church does not embody its truth, then postmoderns will look elsewhere for truth. “The messengers must model the message.”<sup>36</sup>

### The Powerful Church

The modern American church avoids crossing cultural borders because Christendom exchanged incarnation for power. The failing Roman Empire eventually viewed the Popes as “successors of the Caesars.”<sup>37</sup> The Church structured itself after the hierarchical structure of the powerful Roman Empire, rather than after the humble Son of God. The Emperor exiled, and the Church excommunicated those who would not subscribe to the Church’s orthodoxy. While in the center of culture, the Church substituted “visible organizational unity for the unity of love and mixed the kind of power represented by the Roman Empire with that of the Cross and the resurrection.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 3.

<sup>35</sup> Clapp, *A Peculiar People*, 188.

<sup>36</sup> Wright, *Simply Christian*, 204.

<sup>37</sup> Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, 340.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

The Church sanctified the Empire's political wars and coerced the conquered foes of the Empire into converting to Christianity. The Church's use of power can be seen from the crusades through the colonialism of the 19th and 20th century missionary movement. Some sixth century bishops even had armies and bore arms.<sup>39</sup>

In contrast, Jesus came to earth empty of his rights as God, and had no place to rest his head. God's mission was to restore, not to conquer. Jesus proclaimed a subversive truth in occupied territory, dangerously confronting a powerful religious institution. The truth He spoke was powerful, but He did not use power to persuade. Jesus respected individual choice, even when that choice nailed Him to a cross.

The Church's identity is in the restorative mission of God, not in the power of God. Humility is required if the Church is going to fulfill God's mission. Humility involves listening to culture, identifying their stories, symbols, and metaphors, and learning their language. Humility requires risk-taking and self-sacrifice, which is difficult for a Church that identifies itself in terms of power.

Kimball states that postmodern individuals are suspicious of the church's attractional methods, thinking that church is all about "hierarchy, power, and control with a political agenda."<sup>40</sup> Postmodern people see the church as made up of "leaders who function like CEOs and desire power and control."<sup>41</sup> Kimball says that the church's use of power over humility "comes across very unlike Jesus, since it equates the church with big

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 336.

<sup>40</sup> Kimball, *They Like Jesus But Not the Church*, 76.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 79.



business and only reinforces the idea that the church is organized religion.”<sup>42</sup> For the postmodern, power equals organized religion, but humility equals Jesus.

Postmodern culture is more like the pluralistic culture of the first century than the Christendom culture of the middle Ages. The modern American church needs to reapply Jesus’ model if it wants to turn postmodern people into disciples of Jesus. The ancient church applied the model of Jesus, and crossed many cultural boundaries. “Crossing cultural boundaries has been the life blood of historic Christianity.”<sup>43</sup> Walls points out that there were Christian communities in Africa from “subapostolic or early patristic times,” and that Christians were in Asia for 1,500 years prior to the first western missionary.<sup>44</sup>

The modern American church acts as if the powerful, dualistic, universal, and attractional Christendom church is the model for the contemporary world. Each characteristic plays a role in preventing the church from following the model of Jesus, which the ancient church did follow. In contrast to power, Jesus was humble, and the ancient church took risks. In contrast to universal, Jesus was incarnational, and the ancient church allowed the Gentiles to find their own way. In contrast to attraction, Jesus ministered on the margins, and the ancient church scattered.

Prior to Christendom, the ancient Church, without State sponsorship, grew from “as few as 25,000” in AD 100 “up to 20,000,000” by AD 310.<sup>45</sup> Walls reports that in

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>43</sup> Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, 32.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>45</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 18.

1800, over 90 percent of the world's professing Christians lived in Europe or North America. Today 60 percent of them live in Africa, Asia, Latin America, or the Pacific.<sup>46</sup> Christendom mode no longer works in the Church, and it no longer works in the chapel.

### **The Keesler Chapel: Following the Modern American Church**

The Keesler AFB chapel, as part of the modern American church, is also influenced by characteristics of Christendom. The big difference between the modern American church and the chapel is that the chapel is sponsored by the USAF. In some respects, this sponsorship amplifies some of the characteristics of Christendom seen in the USAF chapel, described in chapter 3.

The chapel's Christian community receives its identity from the sponsorship of the USAF and from the mission of God. The nature of the Church, including the chapel, should flow out of mission, not determine mission. The church needs to become the "church in the world—gathering for worship in order to go out in mission."<sup>47</sup> In practice, it appears as though the mission of chapel's Christian community is to gather for worship, then go home.

Christendom is not alive in the culture of the postmodern airmen. The student spirituality survey showed that postmodern spirituality is not necessarily tied to one religion, or to any religion. To the extent the chapel relies upon attractional programming, with a goods and services approach to spiritual care, the spiritual-but-not-religious airman will not be interested.

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<sup>46</sup> Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, 31.

<sup>47</sup> Gibbs, *Churchnext*, 236.

In the same way Jesus and the ancient Church crossed cultural boundaries to fulfill their mission, the chapel's Christian community must cross into the culture of the spiritual-but-not-religious airman. The chapel's Christian community must reclaim its identity as the missional people of God, cross the postmodern cultural boundary, and incarnate the Gospel in the postmodern culture of the spiritual-but-not-religious airman. The E2 culture of the spiritual-but-not-religious airman is in the chapel's backyard. Spiritual conversations and an annual spirituality survey will accomplish this goal.

### **Summary**

Crossing cultural boundaries was a normative missional practice in the ancient Church. The ancient Church followed Jesus' model of being incarnational as it crossed cultural boundaries with the Gospel. The Christendom church failed to continue crossing cultural boundaries because it looked to the State for its identity and lost its identity as the missional people of God. The Church utilized the power and sponsorship of the State to create a universal culture, and became the bearer of that culture. As the Church became more powerful, it adopted the characteristics of its benefactor and exchanged incarnation for attraction, and a messianic world-view for dualism.

The modern church, including the USAF chapel's Christian community, has inherited the attractional and dualistic characteristics of Christendom. The church acts as if it is still in the center of culture, but it is no longer. Postmodernity has pushed the church to the margins of culture and pluralism dominates postmodern American culture as it did in the first century. Although many cultures exist side by side, the church has not

incarnated the Gospel into postmodern culture. As a result, the USAF chapel's Christian community has not captured the interest of postmodern people; therefore, a new incarnation of the Gospel is needed for the postmodern culture. The church needs to return to its identity as the missional people of God with a missional ecclesiology.

The Keesler AFB chapel must cross into the postmodern culture and employ a new incarnation of the Gospel to care for the spiritual-but-not-religious students. A Christendom-mode ecclesiology is incompatible with a missional identity. To the extent the chapel operates in Christendom mode, it does not reflect its identity as the missional people of God. Jesus and the ancient church were not attractional, dualistic, nor powerful. The chapel must follow the model of Jesus and the ancient church, recommit to its missional identity, and employ an ecclesiology which sends, listens, builds relationships, and ultimately creates disciples who are E1 with respect to their culture.

Offering a spiritual conversations gathering in the Fishbowl crosses the cultural boundary of the postmodern airmen and provides a new incarnation of the Gospel. Conversations build relationships, and relationships influence people. Spiritual-but-not-religious airmen are young adults, fresh out of high school, trying to figure out their own spirituality. They need a guide and the Christian chaplain can be that guide.

Spiritual conversations is not a comprehensive discipleship program, but a way to draw interest toward Jesus. God's prevenient grace is active in the lives of the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen. The kingdom of God is still near. The Christian chaplain, as Jesus did, can point out God's activity in peoples' lives by utilizing the common ground of spirituality. Perhaps spiritual conversations will continue the serial expansion of

Christianity<sup>48</sup> by providing resources spiritual-but-not-religious airmen need to start their own Christian movement.

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<sup>48</sup> Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, 13.

## CHAPTER 6

### APPLICATION FOR THE USAF CHAPLAIN

How can the Keesler Air Force Base Chapel provide spiritual care for spiritual-but-not-religious airmen? The chapel must embrace the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen by offering a spiritual conversations gathering and by conducting an annual spirituality survey. The chapel currently offers spiritual care through a plurality of religions. If an airman belongs to a particular religious group, then the chapel can serve the airman. If the airman is spiritual, but does not identify with a particular religious group, then there is currently no assistance the chapel can provide except one-on-one counseling with a Christian chaplain. The chapel utilizes a religions-based approach to spiritual care, dominated by Christianity.

One aim of this dissertation is to motivate chapel leadership, Christian chaplains, and the chapel's Christian community to take a missional approach to ministry by embracing spiritual-but-not-religious students. Such an effort will enhance the spiritual health of participants and may lead some spiritual-but-not-religious students to establish a relationship with Jesus. The Great Commission lays responsibility on the Christian chaplain and on the chapel's Christian community to embrace students who are not attracted to the chapel's religious services. The chapel can embrace the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen by offering a spiritual conversations gathering and by conducting an annual spirituality survey.

### **The Solution Part One: A Spirituality Survey**

The process to embrace the spiritual-but-not-religious student airmen begins with a spirituality survey.<sup>1</sup> The survey format is conversational, with the chaplain asking open-ended questions. The survey provides an opportunity to listen to the spiritual needs of the students, learn about postmodern spirituality, and find the images, metaphors, and language within which to translate the Gospel. The student spirituality survey presents new forms of spiritual care, which, if implemented by the chapel, can motivate students to seek spiritual wellness through the chapel.

USAF chapels conduct an annual survey, which is part of the Global Ministry process. Besides some commanders and first sergeants, the Global Ministry survey process normally only targets those who already attend chapel worship. The Spirituality Survey targets spiritual-but-not-religious airmen who do not attend chapel worship.

### **The Solution Part Two: A Spiritual Conversations Gathering**

The solution, following the three warrants of the dissertation, considers and matches the needs of the spiritual-but-not-religious student, follows Jesus' model, and expresses the Church's missional identity by sending the Church across a cultural boundary. The solution is locally derived and may not be effective at every USAF base.

The spiritual conversations gathering (hereafter referred to as "the gathering") is comprised of spiritual-but-not-religious student airmen who do not feel they fit into any

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A.

religious category. Some of the airmen are searching for their spiritual identity. Other airmen desire spiritual growth and an enhancement of their spiritual wellness outside of an organized religion.

The chaplain recruits participants and leads the gathering by facilitating the discussion. The chaplain describes the group using the phrase: “No debate, just conversation.” The chaplain is comfortable with pluralism, understands postmodernism, and engages students like a missionary would engage an indigenous culture. Most importantly, the chaplain has a love for the spiritual-but-not-religious students, and a desire to partner with God in restoring their relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

The long-term goal for the gathering is for the chaplain to influence participants to consider following Christ by embodying the love of God, bringing awareness to God’s activity and love, and engaging the students in conversations about their spirituality. Given that postmodern individuals tend not trust in the Christian salvation-history metanarrative, the gathering will “activate a search for truth.”<sup>2</sup> At some point in the relationship, the students may ask chaplains about their spirituality.

Student training occurs quickly at Keesler AFB; therefore, some students may only attend the gathering a handful of times. The shorter-term goal is to support and enhance the spirituality of the participants, improving their spiritual wellness. The definition of spirituality from Chapter 2 serves as a way to measure the spiritual wellness of the participants without excluding anyone. To measure spiritual wellness, an entrance

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<sup>2</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 51.



and exit survey is given to participants, including the questions: How integrated is your behavior with your values? How connected do you feel you are with God, others, and creation? How motivated are you to face the challenges of life?

The chaplain is motivated by a desire to help participants discern God's presence, activity, and love. The chaplain approaches the gathering with a framework which encourages participants to share stories of spiritual experiences and looks for evidence of the Spirit's presence and activity. Rather than imposing an external, objective metanarrative on the stories, the chaplain helps the group build a metanarrative centered on the Spirit's activity and presence. The chaplain is also motivated by a desire to soften the rank barrier between chaplain and student airmen so that a more authentic relationship grows between the chaplain and the student.

### The Gathering Considers Postmodern Values

Chapter 2 argues that just as effective physical fitness training matches the physical fitness needs of the trainee, in the same way effective spiritual care matches the spiritual needs of the participants. The gathering meets the needs of participants because it considers and embraces their values. Spiritual-but-not-religious students value pluralism, experience, spirituality, and relationships.

### **Pluralism: The Other Side of Openness**

The gathering embraces pluralism by including each participant's spirituality in the discussion. Diversity is encouraged and protected in the military environment, and

freedom of religion fills the military environment with a plurality of traditional religious faiths, several of which are expressed at the chapel. The influence of postmodernism adds a plurality of individual spiritualities to the military environment.

Some writers acknowledge that Christianity and pluralism, as an ideology, are not compatible. Jesus is the only way to God. Newbigin, however, suggests that in a postmodern culture “a Christian must welcome some measure of plurality, but reject pluralism.”<sup>3</sup> The Christian chaplain does not personally subscribe to pluralism, but approaches it with respect and withholds public judgment in order to keep an open door into the spirituality of participants.

The chaplain approaches the gathering from a Christian framework that affirms the universal presence of the Spirit of God.<sup>4</sup> “God is universally present and active in the Spirit.”<sup>5</sup> Pluralism is embraceable because it provides access into the students’ spiritual lives. Rejecting pluralism may also reject a participant’s interpretation of an authentic experience with the Spirit. Yong suggests that “human life and experience is dependent only on the prevenient presence and activity of the Spirit of God, and that this should put

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<sup>3</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 243.

<sup>4</sup> In Genesis 2:7, God inspired humanity. In Acts 2, the Spirit was universally poured out. Acts 17:28 declares that all humanity are God’s offspring. John 1:9 declares that light is given to all humanity. Romans 1:20 declares that God makes Himself known to everyone.

<sup>5</sup> Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 44. Yong develops a pneumatological approach to the theology of religions around three axioms. This is his first axiom.

us on the alert for possible experiences of the Spirit and alternative specifications of the pneumatological imagination outside of explicitly PC or even Christian contexts.”<sup>6</sup>

Roxburgh contends that without trust in the guidance of a metanarrative, postmodern life is “weightless.”<sup>7</sup> A weightless life is open to influence. The student spirituality survey results showed that pluralistic spiritual-but-not-religious student airmen are open to change and influence based on experiences, local culture, and relationships. By embracing pluralism, the chaplain also embraces an opportunity to influence participants. Christianity is also a potential discussion topic because the Christian chaplain is a participant.

### **Spirituality: From Discernment to Identification**

The gathering embraces spirituality by providing a public forum for spiritual discussion. Postmodern culture provides freedom for airmen to explore spirituality outside of traditional religions. Spirituality, suppressed by modernity, has erupted into a “volcano of spirituality”<sup>8</sup> in postmodern culture. The operational military environment favors modern values that either suppress spirituality in the workplace or encourage spirituality to conform to a particular religion.

The Christian chaplain embraces participant spiritualities because God creates every person with the ability to sense the Spirit. Yong writes, “God’s Spirit is the life-

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>7</sup> Roxburgh, *Reaching a New Generation*, 36.

<sup>8</sup> Wright, *Simply Christian*, 19.

breath of the imago Dei in every human being and the presupposition of all human relationships and communities.”<sup>9</sup> The Spirit brings the image of God to life in people. Spiritualities are an expression of the active life of the Spirit within participants. Without trust in a metanarrative, participants organize spiritual experiences outside of tradition, leading to a potential plurality of individual spiritualities, and the source of some or all participant spiritualities is the Spirit of the God.

The chaplain enters the discussion with non-personal, pneumatological language. Discussing spirituality from a pneumatological, rather than from a soteriological or christological point of view, minimizes debate and exclusion. Pneumatology provides a common language with which to discuss spirituality. The Christian chaplain approaches pneumatology from a Trinitarian point of view, but enters the conversation with non-personal language.<sup>10</sup>

The chaplain can influence participants toward discernment of the Spirit’s activity. Yong calls spiritual discernment the “hermeneutics of life that is both a divine gift and a human activity aimed at reading correctly the inner processes of all things—persons, institutions, events, rites, experiences, and so on.”<sup>11</sup> The Chaplain listens for and draws attention to spiritual experiences that reflect the character of God revealed in Jesus. Spiritual experiences that result in self-sacrificing love (1 John 4:16, 19), an authentic

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<sup>9</sup> Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 45. This is Yong’s second axiom.

<sup>10</sup> Paul’s approach to the Athenians (Acts 17:23) by recognizing their “unknown god” before revealing His identity.

<sup>11</sup> Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 129.

search for truth (John 14:17, 16:13), the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23), or reflect the words of Jesus (John 14:26) may be God's activity. Discernment of the Spirit's activity follows Jesus, who taught His disciples to read the signs (Matt. 16:3).

The chaplain influences participant attention away from personal spiritual experiences toward identification of the source of spiritual activity. Introspection alone will not connect a person to God. "Made for spirituality, we wallow in introspection."<sup>12</sup> Jesus often pointed people to evidence of the nearness of the kingdom of God. Kingdom language, although meaningful to a Christian, may not be meaningful for postmodern participants who do not trust a Christian metanarrative. Kingdom implies a King whom postmoderns may find too objectively transcendent.

Instead of utilizing King or kingdom language, the chaplain encourages participants to identify what or Who is behind spiritual experiences. The chaplain offers to identify the unknown god, as Paul did to the Athenians (Acts 17:23). The student spirituality survey showed that spiritual-but-not-religious airmen are comfortable with God-language. Instead of participants having spiritual experiences, the conversation moves toward affirming that something or Someone is creating spiritual experiences. Spiritual activity may be God's activity.

Sweet writes, "Instead of 'kingdom' language, what if we were to approach the Christian metanarrative as 'The Presence.'"<sup>13</sup> Postmodern individuals may be less likely

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<sup>12</sup> Wright, *Simply Christian*, 237.

<sup>13</sup> Sweet, *The Three Hardest Words in the World to Get Right*, 52-53.

to accept an abstract kingdom than a personal Presence. The student spirituality survey revealed that students are open to something or someone transcendent. When the survey asked what spirituality means to students, they all responded with some form of higher power, God, or gods.

The Christian chaplain offers The Presence as a way to identify the source of spiritual experiences. Some participants may accept a personification of spiritual experience, and some may not (Acts 17:34). “We receive The Presence as a gift.”<sup>14</sup> Jesus used parables to describe the kingdom of God, leaving acceptance of the kingdom up to the hearers. Once personified, the chaplain offers the possibility of a message behind The Presence. Sweet writes, “In these three words is the essence of The Presence: ‘I love you.’”<sup>15</sup>

The chaplain can also introduce the possibility of communication with The Presence. If participants accept that The Presence is sending a message, perhaps participants will accept that it is possible to respond to the message. Jesus provided a two-way path between heaven and earth. The Holy Spirit makes a complete relationship with God possible.

The chaplain embraces participant spiritualities in order to partner with God to restore their relationship with God. A relationship cannot be restored unless there is a Person with whom to relate. Awareness of God’s closeness and message transforms a

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 59.

passive recipient of spiritual experiences into an active participant in a relationship with God. Spiritual experiences are not ends in themselves, but evidence of God's nearness and desire for relationship. "If there's any truth in the thirst for spirituality it could be simply that humans find satisfaction in exploring a spiritual dimension to their lives, or it could be that we are made for relationship with another Being who can only be known that way."<sup>16</sup>

One role of the USAF chaplain, according to the USAF Chaplain Service, is to be a "Visible reminder of the Holy."<sup>17</sup> In a post-Christian culture, "the Holy" may have little meaning and perpetuates the clergy-laity dualism, exacerbating airmen's fear of chaplain rank.<sup>18</sup> The role assumes that airmen have a dormant faith, and need to be reminded of their commitment to God. Such a reminder is appropriate where the Bible and Christianity are widely accepted, but not in postmodernity. The role brings Constantine-style evangelism into a post-Constantine world.<sup>19</sup> Ministry to postmodern airmen is more effective when the chaplain becomes a verbal facilitator of The Presence.

### **Experience: From Self to the Story**

The gathering embraces the postmodern value of experience because God has always revealed Himself through human experience in history. God created history when

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<sup>16</sup> Wright, *Simply Christian*, 51.

<sup>17</sup> Potter, "Air Force Instruction 52-101," 2.

<sup>18</sup> The student spirituality survey revealed that students fear chaplains because of rank differences.

<sup>19</sup> Clapp, *A Peculiar People*, 159-163.

He made the world and humanity. God revealed Himself to humanity through humans such as Abraham, Moses, and Israel. God revealed Himself through historical experiences such as the Exodus and Exile. God's greatest revelation occurred in Jesus, whose entrance into human experience blessed history.

The gathering embraces the postmodern value of experience by beginning with participant experience. "Experience is the new currency of our culture. In the past we gained knowledge of a subject or issue and then later validated that knowledge. Today, people have an experience that is later validated by knowledge."<sup>20</sup> The gathering respects the postmodern value of experience by allowing stories of participant spiritual experience to guide the discussion. A linear evangelism or discipleship plan will not work. One-way teaching from chaplain to participant will not work. Students spend over thirty hours each week in a military classroom, which utilizes lecture and linear, cognitive learning.

Postmodern individuals do not accept truth from an outward authority, such as a chaplain or church. They question certainty and absolutes, preferring to develop truth from experience. On the journey to truth, narratives provide a way to express and organize spiritual experiences. "Our lives are lived as story. Story is how we organize our lives."<sup>21</sup> Narrative presents experience without forcing opinion or passing judgment. Narrative leaves interpretation up to the listener. Modernity's rationality tends to drive spirituality into the private realm, suppressing story and proclaiming that truth must be

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<sup>20</sup> Myers, *The Search to Belong*, 186.

<sup>21</sup> Christina Baldwin, *Storycatcher: How the Power of Story Can Change Our Lives* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2005), 76.



rational. The gathering honors postmodern subjectivity by making room for narrative, rational or not.

The chaplain invites a participant to share a story about a spiritual experience. “This is where the limitations of human consciousness show up: we need words in order to make things real. If we don’t talk about something, it’s as though it’s not happening. And yet it is happening.”<sup>22</sup> Putting words to a spiritual experience brings life to the experience and makes it real and public. If a participant cannot find anything to share, the chaplain points out that all the participants share a common USAF story. Every participant decided to move from civilian into military life, graduated from basic military training, and entered technical training at Keesler AFB. Drawing on the definition of spirituality in chapter 2, the chaplain asks how a participant’s spirituality motivated him or her to overcome USAF challenges, integrate values and behavior, and connect with God and others.

The chaplain invites the narrator to reflect on their story. “Reflection is the first step in making sense.”<sup>23</sup> Reflection is more than a cognitive reflection, but also includes how a spiritual experience has changed the participant. The chaplain invites the listeners to participate by comparing the narrator’s experience to their own. “This is part of our attraction to each other: what can I learn from your story that helps me see my own?”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 117.

During the discussion, the chaplain listens for common elements between participant stories and the Biblical story. With no trust in metanarrative and no interest in religion, there is no external, objective guide with which participants organize their experiences. “Religion is also story. Religion is grown out of an innate spiritual base, but takes spirituality and systematizes it to foster uniformity, universality, and immutability.”<sup>25</sup> Spiritual-but-not-religious participants may not possess any religious system with which to organize their experience. However, the student spirituality survey showed that spiritual-but-not-religious students were all familiar with the story of Jesus.

The chaplain introduces, as a way to organize the stories, the possibility of a common story between the Presence and humanity, or at least between the Presence and the airmen at Keesler AFB. The chaplain moves the participants from introspection toward God’s activity in human history, or God’s activity at Keesler AFB. Christianity is not a world of principals and facts, but a world of stories captured in the Bible and in church tradition. The Bible’s story of God’s activity to restore relationship with humanity continues into current human experience. Human history has a common story because God has come into human history, through Jesus and the Spirit, and provided *telos*. Drawing on the definition of spirituality described in chapter 2, the chaplain can pick from a variety of Biblical stories, including stories of Jesus, that reveal how God motivated people to overcome challenges. Some Bible stories deal with integrity, and

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 195.

others show how to be connected with God, others, and creation, and the consequences of disconnection.

Modernity viewed the world in terms of causality. Postmodern individuals are intuitively looking for connections and relationship with something bigger than themselves. “Stories make bridges where opinions make walls.”<sup>26</sup> The chaplain must keep in mind that saying “the Bible says” holds little authority for postmodern individuals. The chaplain injects Biblical story not as authority but as one possibility of a common story. Injecting Biblical material serves to fund the postmodern imagination<sup>27</sup> as participants search for humanity’s or Keesler AFB’s common story with the Presence.

### **Relationships: From Me to Us**

Much of the previous discussion has already revealed that the gathering embraces the postmodern value of relationship. In addition, the gathering embraces the postmodern value of relationship by creating a new community. The gathering, held in the Fishbowl, is the only place at Keesler AFB where a student can go to discuss spirituality. The gathering responds to a desire expressed during the student spirituality survey. Students want a place to meet with other spiritual-but-not-religious students and form a spirituality discussion group.

The gathering embraces the value of relationship because it allows students to belong before they believe. The gathering has no standards of belief or religious labels,

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>27</sup> Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotiation*, 1-91.

other than “spiritual but not religious.” The definition of “spiritual but not religious” is left up to the student.

The gathering embraces the value of relationship because it establishes a new level of relationship with the chaplain, breaking down airmen’s fear of rank. The student spirituality survey revealed that students fear chaplains because of their officer rank. To assist in breaking down rank, chaplains are authentic and open with the students. Chaplains attend the gathering in civilian clothes as a symbol of their humanity. The gathering assembles in the Fishbowl instead of at the chapel. The Fishbowl is where students gather during their off-duty time. Chaplains enter the world of the students rather than inviting the students to enter the world of the chaplain.

The gathering embraces the value of relationship by creating room for individual expression. Grenz and Franke assert that people are fundamentally social, “Whatever the self is, it is a social reality.”<sup>28</sup> By contrast, the military environment de-humanizes people by requiring constant conformity. Everyone wears the same uniform, follows the same chain of command, and works together to accomplish the common mission. The military rarely recognizes individuality except when it results in extraordinary accomplishment. Teamwork through conformity is highly valued in the military environment. The gathering allows room for an individual’s spirituality without judgment.

Spirituality incorporates disciplines and habits which bring integration, connection, and motivation to life. The chaplain offers the gathering as a spiritual

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<sup>28</sup> Grenz and. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 200.

discipline for mutual spiritual support. Participants discuss and share how to integrate behavior and values, how to connect with God, others, and creation, and what motivates them to face the challenges of life. The gathering is not about teaching but about supporting and encouraging each other on the journey. The gathering is the only forum which gathers together spiritual-but-not-religious airmen to discuss and support spirituality. The gathering provides spiritual journey partners by establishing new relationships between spiritual-but-not-religious students and the chaplain.

The chaplain offers the gathering as a spiritual discipline for improving connection with the wider Keesler community. Spirituality, as defined, includes connection with God, others, and creation. The gathering organizes regular community improvement projects such as Mississippi gulf coast relief, The Red Cross, Habitat for Humanity, the Salvation Army, and invites anyone to participate. The gathering utilizes volunteer experiences as a topic for discussion.

The source of the postmodern desire for relationship is the *imago Dei*, brought to life by the Spirit of God. Modernity suppressed the human need for relationships and community by emphasizing autonomy. Yong writes, “God’s spirit is the life-breath of the *imago Dei* in every human being and the presupposition of all human relationships and communities.”<sup>29</sup> The chaplain nudges the discussion beyond spirituality as something to experience, toward spirituality as Someone that we experience together. The chaplain introduces the idea that there is a Presence behind spiritual activity, who wants a

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<sup>29</sup> Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 45.

relationship with every individual. The Presence can only be known through the spiritual dimension of human life. “If there’s any truth in the thirst for spirituality it could be simply that humans find satisfaction in exploring a spiritual dimension to their lives, or it could be that we are made for relationship with another Being who can only be known that way.”<sup>30</sup>

The chaplain directs attention toward an empty chair, a symbol of The Presence. “If the basic issue of evangelism is how we help people meet Jesus, then evangelism is not doctrinal transactions, but spiritual interactions.”<sup>31</sup> If the participants accept The Presence as the source and goal of spiritual experiences, the chaplain invites participants to interact with The Presence in any way that seems appropriate.

### The Gathering Follows Jesus’ Model

The gathering embraces the four postmodern values described in chapter 2, and follows Jesus’ model as described in chapter 4. Jesus came to earth empty<sup>32</sup> of His rights as God, but not His identity. Jesus took on the nature of a servant, and obeyed God to the end. Although He was the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus humbled himself when he came to earth. In the same way, chaplains humble themselves in leading the gathering, hoping to remove the officer-enlisted barrier of rank. The chaplain wears civilian clothes, encourages participants to use his or her first name, and reveals his or her spiritual

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<sup>30</sup> Wright, *Simply Christian*, 51.

<sup>31</sup> Leonard I. Sweet, *Out of the Question . . . Into the Mystery: Getting Lost in the Godlife Relationship* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2004), 85.

<sup>32</sup> Philippians 2:7 asserts that Jesus “made himself nothing.”

journey in authentic ways. The chaplain does not present himself or herself as a spiritual expert, but as a fellow spiritual traveler. The seating is ordered in such a way as to not put the chaplain in a position of authority, such as at the head of the table.

### **The Gathering is Missional**

The gathering follows Jesus' model by being missional. Jesus came in the flesh because those He wanted to contact were in the flesh; however, Jesus' bodily experience also brought attention and glory to God. In the same way, the gathering is missional in that it embraces the values of the spiritual-but-not-religious student airmen, but reframes and redirects the values so that they point participants to God's presence and activity. God embraced human life through the Incarnation then transformed human life through the resurrection. Part of Jesus' mission was to embrace His culture in order to transform it. In the same way the chaplain embraces the values of the spiritual-but-not-religious student airmen in order to point them to God.

The gathering follows Jesus' example by targeting the lost, or as Henderson describes, "The people Jesus misses most."<sup>33</sup> Jesus adapted to people through conversation. To those who were religious, Jesus spoke in religious terms. To those who were not religious, Jesus spoke in spiritual terms. In the same way, the gathering utilizes terminology and ideas which will relate to participants. The chaplain redirects and

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<sup>33</sup> Jim Henderson, A.K.A. *"Lost": Discovering Ways to Connect with the People Jesus Misses Most* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2005), 3.

reframes participant experiences so that they point to God and the possibility of relationship with Him through Jesus.

The gathering follows Jesus' missional model by making a relationship with God accessible to everyone. Jesus received the reputation of being a friend of sinners because, to the religious leaders, it seemed that Jesus was being too gracious. The religious leaders required those who repented to follow correct procedures before they could be accepted by God. Jesus accepted anyone who wanted to follow him. In the same way, the gathering allows anyone to participate. The gathering makes the Gospel available to anyone. Yong writes that Pentecost was an extension of "the boundaries of those who could be the people of God."<sup>34</sup>

### **The Gathering is Relational**

Much of the previous discussion reveals that the gathering follows the relational model of Jesus. In addition, the gathering follows the model of Jesus because it ultimately seeks to connect people with God. God's mission is to restore relationship with humanity. Jesus spoke about the nearness and invitation of the kingdom of God. If people do not go to church to experience and meet God, then the gathering brings God to them. God's Spirit has been universally poured out; therefore He is present wherever people gather, even in the Fishbowl.

The gathering follows the model of Jesus who talked with people. The gathering is about conversation and discussion because relationships can form through

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<sup>34</sup> Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 38.



conversation. The gathering is not about teaching or dispensing information, but about sharing the spiritual journey with others. Willard writes, “Now there are no formulas in the spiritual life, because it is not a life that runs on its own. It runs in interaction with God.”<sup>35</sup> The gathering is not structured around a linear teaching plan, but around relationships. The chaplain hopes that developing relationships with participants influences the participants to follow Jesus. Conversations establish and build relationships and relationships influence people.

The gathering follows the model of Jesus who ate meals with people. One reason Jesus offended the religious leaders is because sharing a meal with someone communicated acceptance of the person. The gathering often eats together. Besides the pragmatism of attracting a crowd of young airmen, eating together embodies acceptance and relationship.

### The Gathering Expresses the Church’s Missional Identity

Much of the preceding discussion reveals how the gathering expresses the church’s missional identity. The gathering moves the chapel across the boundary between the chapel’s religion and the spirituality of the spiritual-but-not-religious student airmen. Crossing cultural boundaries is a normative practice in the church.

The gathering expresses the church’s missional identity by meeting in the Fishbowl. The Fishbowl is at the center of student’s lives while they are at Keesler AFB. The gathering moves spirituality out of the chapel building, and into the center of student

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<sup>35</sup> Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*, 112.

life. Jesus brought spirituality into everyday life. The gathering follows Jesus' model by bringing spirituality not only out of an individual's private life, but also by bringing it into the center of student life.

The gathering expresses the church's missional identity by embodying God's love. The chaplain gives space and time to spiritual-but-not-religious student airmen. When chaplains eat with, spend time with, and listen to the participants, they express God's love. McLaren writes that to be missional is not to save people, but to "join Jesus in expressing God's love for the whole world."<sup>36</sup>

The gathering expresses the church's missional identity by embracing people outside of the chapel. The gathering includes the participants in the life of the church, and makes them aware of God's activity. To become a disciple of Jesus, a person must participate in the life of the church community and participate in the "activity of God."<sup>37</sup>

The gathering expresses the church's missional identity by inviting the chapel community to participate in the gathering. A chaplain can operate the gathering alone; however, chaplains come and go and get deployed frequently. The gathering is more effective if it maintains a consistent meeting time. Kimball writes, "Emerging generations need and are actually seeking individuals who have been down the road of life before them."<sup>38</sup> The chaplain invites chapel participants to attend and participate in the

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<sup>36</sup> McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 114.

<sup>37</sup> Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 215.

<sup>38</sup> Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids, MI Zondervan, 2003), 150.

gathering, after helping them understand its purpose and method. The chaplain searches for someone who can lead the gathering in his or her absence. Additionally, the chapel community is invited to provide hospitality to the gathering. The chapel community can provide home-cooked meals for participants, and thereby communicate God's love.

### **Measuring Outcomes**

Without a formula, measuring outcomes is difficult; however, the definition of spirituality developed in chapter 2 can serve as a way to measure the outcome of the gathering. The dissertation views spirituality in terms of integration between inner values and outward behavior, in terms of a connection with God, others, and the world, and in terms of motivation to face life's challenges.<sup>39</sup> The long-term goal for the gathering is to move participants toward establishing a relationship with God through Jesus. The short-term goal is to support participant spirituality.

There are many ways to measure spiritual wellness, but none are completely objective. "At this time there is no known objective measure of spiritual development."<sup>40</sup> Adams states that spirituality is "an important but insufficiently developed dimension of wellness,"<sup>41</sup> and suggests the use of the Perceived Wellness Survey<sup>42</sup> which relies on

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<sup>39</sup> The USAF chapel exists in a pluralistic environment. The author decided to not utilize an exclusively Christian definition because some students who are interested in a spiritual conversations gathering may have no reference to God in their spirituality. The author is Christian and is interested in connecting airmen with Jesus. Jesus is the only way to fulfill this definition of spirituality and become spiritually healthy.

<sup>40</sup> Cynthia K. Chandler, Janice Miner Holden, and Cheryl A. Kolander, "Counseling for Spiritual Wellness: Theory and Practice," *Journal of Counseling & Development* 71, no. 2 (1992): 171.

perception. Ellison's Spiritual Well-Being Scale,<sup>43</sup> perhaps the most widely used instrument, also relies on perception. The definition described in chapter two also relies on perception.

To measure outcomes, the chaplain has participants fill out an entrance survey, and an exit survey before they graduate. The survey asks how well the participant feels they integrate values with behavior, and connect with God, others, and the world. The survey will also ask how well the participant feels they are motivated to face life's challenges. A comparison between the entrance and exit surveys will measure how spiritual wellness has or has not improved.

### **A Personal Dream**

Perhaps the spiritual conversations gathering will continue the serial expansion of Christianity<sup>44</sup> by providing resources spiritual-but-not-religious airmen need to start their own Christian movement. Newly-enlisted airmen move around quickly during their first two years of active duty. Basic Military Training (BMT) begins at Lackland AFB in San Antonio, Texas, and lasts for nine weeks. After BMT, airmen are transported to their technical training base, several of which are scattered throughout the United States.

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<sup>41</sup> Troy B. Adams and Janet R. Bezner, "Conceptualization and Measurement of the Spiritual and Psychological Dimensions of Wellness in A," *Journal of American College Health* 48, no. 4 (2000): 167.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>43</sup> Craig W. Ellison, "Spiritual Well-Being: Conceptualization and Measurement," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 11, no. 4 (1983).

<sup>44</sup> Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, 13.

Keesler AFB is one of those technical training bases. Students attend technical training anywhere from four weeks to eight months. After graduating from Keesler, some students continue their technical training at a different base, and others go to their first duty station. Many newly-enlisted airmen are deployed from four to twelve months during their first two years of active duty.

Robinson believes that the church needs to shift from “institution to movement, from structures that invite people into sacred space to an infectious spirituality that invades secular space.”<sup>45</sup> Perhaps the spiritual conversations gathering can ignite such a movement among newly-enlisted airman. If BMT offers such a gathering, and each of the USAF’s technical training bases offers such a gathering, then spiritual-but-not-religious students would have continuity with regard to their spiritual care. Perhaps the gatherings would spark a movement toward the creation of an indigenous form of Christianity among student airmen. A new form of church would emerge that could relate much better to student airmen than the chaplain. An emerging church would create, using Ralph Winter’s terminology, E1 witnesses among the spiritual-but-not-religious airmen. At best, the chaplain is E2 with respect to postmodern airmen.

### Conclusion

Culture has changed from modern to postmodern, influencing some airmen away from traditional categories of religion toward a personalized spirituality. A student spirituality survey showed that a significant number of Keesler’s spiritual-but-not-

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<sup>45</sup> Robinson and Smith, *Invading Secular Space*, 109.

religious students share the values of postmodern culture. Currently, a spiritual-but-not-religious airman must conform to one of the chapel's religions in order to find spiritual care. Airmen who choose not to participate are excluded from the chapel's spiritual care and may suffer a reduction in spiritual health, adversely affecting their ability to complete their mission.

The chapel's current worship structure, religious education, and pastoral care efforts target those who fit into a traditional religion and alienate those who do not fit. The chapel operates in attractional, dualistic, and hierarchical ways, following a Christendom model of ministry rather than following Jesus as the model for ministry. A church that follows a Christendom model will not garner the participation of a postmodern person. The chapel has lost its identity as the missional people of God. Instead, they see themselves as the provider of religious goods and services. A spiritual conversations gathering and a student spirituality survey are opportunities for the chapel to express their missional identity and influence spiritual-but-not-religious students to follow Jesus.

The biblical basis for an embrace of spiritual-but-not-religious airmen is in God's mission to restore relationship with all humanity. "Perichoresis"<sup>46</sup> describes God's Trinitarian identity in which all of humanity is invited to participate. Creation is an expression of God's relationship invitation. Since the Fall, God is on a mission to restore

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<sup>46</sup> McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 56.

relationship with all humanity. Throughout the Old Testament, God called people and a nation to partner with Him in restoring relationship with all humanity.

In the New Testament, God incarnated as a human being in Jesus, who crossed the boundary between heaven and earth to demonstrate God's mission, love for people, and passion for relationship. Jesus crossed cultural boundaries and engaged in conversation with all people including the religious leaders, Samaritans, Gentiles, and the outcast, abandoned, and ignored. Jesus' major topic was the nearness of kingdom of God and his concern was for the lost.

Jesus' displacement from heaven to earth to heaven created a two-way path between humanity and God. God's mission to restore relationship with humanity was complete. Jesus demonstrated God's identity to humanity, and took humanity's suffering into the Godhead. God allowed this expression of love to impact his being. As the Trinity dance, God holds the nail-scarred hand of His Son, and invites humanity to participate.

Jesus commissioned and empowered his disciples and the church to continue his mission. The church's identity is in the continuing mission of God to find those who are disconnected from God and embrace them with love. The spiritual-but-not-religious student airmen are lost, having been excluded from the chapel.

An embrace of spiritual-but-not-religious airmen is also based on the normative practice in the church to be missional and relational, as Jesus was missional and relational. Jesus is the model for any Christian ministry.

The ancient church followed the model of Jesus. The Church strayed from the model of Jesus in Christendom, and continues to be attractional, dualistic, and hierarchical. The chapel looks more to the sponsorship of the USAF than to Jesus for its identity. The chapel is just as much the missional people of God as any church, but acts as if Christendom still exists. To take its mission seriously, the chapel embraces the spiritual-but-not-religious student airmen by creating a community where they can belong before they believe. Embracing airmen means crossing the postmodern cultural boundary, and finding a way to incarnate the Gospel within their culture.

A spiritual conversations gathering moves the chapel across the postmodern boundary and follows the model of Jesus. Conversations build relationships, and relationships influence people. Spiritual-but-not-religious students are young adults, new high school graduates, trying to figure out their own spirituality. A spiritual conversations gathering provides a community and a forum within which to discuss their spirituality.



## APPENDIX A

### STUDENT SPIRITUALITY SURVEY

| <b>Conversational Component</b>   |  |
|---|--|
| The chaplain asks the following questions to generate discussion.                 |  |
| 1. What does spirituality mean to you?  |  |
| 2. What significant spiritual experiences have you had?                           |  |
| 3. What are your spiritual practices?   |  |
| 4. How does your spirituality impact your everyday life?                          |  |
| 5. What are your spiritual resources that help you be spiritually fit?            |  |
| 6. How can chapel help with your spirituality?                                    |  |
| 7. Is your spirituality tied to a community/group, or is it something individual? |  |

| <b>Written Component</b>   |  |                             |  |
|--|--|-----------------------------|--|
| In your personal spirituality, please choose which is most true. |  |                             |  |
| 1. I base my spirituality on                                     | a. What I experience and feel            | b. What seems logical to me | c. What my church or parents tell me             |
| 2. I believe   | a. In absolute truth                     |                             | b. Truth changes depending on the situation      |
| 3. I prefer to learn   | a. By logical outline                    |                             | b. By stories and other people's experiences     |
| 4. My spirituality is enhanced                                   | a. By experiences                        |                             | b. By acquiring knowledge                        |
| 5. In worship, I desire  | a. Real and authentic worship            |                             | b. A slick and polished event that entertains me |
| 6. If you want to communicate with me                            | a. Use symbols, stories, and images      |                             | b. Words, principals, lecture, outlines          |
| 7. Spirituality for me is  | a. A mechanized process                  |                             | b. An organic, dynamic journey                   |
| 8. My spirituality   | a. Includes some mystery                 |                             | b. I want everything explained                   |
| 9. When it comes to worship                                      | a. I'd rather be passive and entertained |                             | b. I'd rather be active and participate          |

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| 10. My spirituality is   | a. Intertwined with the rest of my life           | b. Separated from the rest of my life         |
| 11. In worship   | a. I'd rather have a personal experience with God | b. Gain information about Him                 |
| 12. It is more desirable   | a. To have a profound spiritual experience        | b. To learn a new truth                       |
| 13. Which is more important to your spirituality?                  | a. Living out your beliefs                        | b. Having the correct beliefs                 |
| 14. Which church do you prefer?                                    | a. One where you can belong before you believe    | b. One where you must believe like the others |
| 15. Which is more essential to your spirituality?                  | a. Truth  | b. Authentic relationships                    |
| Respond to following questions in the space provided.              |   |   |
| 16. What faith group do you lean towards?                          |   |   |
| 17. What is your age?  |   |   |
| 18. How do you define spirituality?                                |   |   |
| 19. How do you define religion?                                    |   |   |
| 20. What religion was most often practiced in your childhood home? |   |   |

## APPENDIX B

### ENTRANCE AND EXIT SURVEYS FOR SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS PARTICIPANTS

| <b>Entrance Survey</b>  |       |   |   |          |   |   |          |   |   |    |
|---|-------|---|---|----------|---|---|----------|---|---|----|
| The spiritual conversations gathering views spirituality in terms of integration between inner values and outward behavior, in terms of a connection with God, others, and the world, and in terms of motivation to face life's challenges. |       |   |   |          |   |   |          |   |   |    |
| Rate the spirituality areas from 1-10.  | Agree |   |   | Somewhat |   |   | Disagree |   |   |    |
| 1. My values are fully integrated with my behavior.   | 1     | 2 | 3 | 4        | 5 | 6 | 7        | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| 2. I am satisfied with my connection with God.  | 1     | 2 | 3 | 4        | 5 | 6 | 7        | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| 3. I am satisfied with my connection to others.   | 1     | 2 | 3 | 4        | 5 | 6 | 7        | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| 4. I am satisfied with my connection to the world.  | 1     | 2 | 3 | 4        | 5 | 6 | 7        | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| 5. I am motivated to face life's challenges.  | 1     | 2 | 3 | 4        | 5 | 6 | 7        | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| I want to participate in the spiritual conversations because . . .  |       |   |   |          |   |   |          |   |   |    |

| Exit Survey   |       |   |   |          |   |   |          |   |   |    |
|---|-------|---|---|----------|---|---|----------|---|---|----|
| The spiritual conversations gathering views spirituality in terms of integration between inner values and outward behavior, in terms of a connection with God, others, and the world, and in terms of motivation to face life's challenges. |       |   |   |          |   |   |          |   |   |    |
| Rate the spirituality areas from 1-10.  | Agree |   |   | Somewhat |   |   | Disagree |   |   |    |
|   | 1     | 2 | 3 | 4        | 5 | 6 | 7        | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| 1. My values are fully integrated with my behavior.   |       |   |   |          |   |   |          |   |   |    |
| 2. I am satisfied with my connection with God.  |       |   |   |          |   |   |          |   |   |    |
| 3. I am satisfied with my connection to others.   |       |   |   |          |   |   |          |   |   |    |
| 4. I am satisfied with my connection to the world.  |       |   |   |          |   |   |          |   |   |    |
| 5. I am motivated to face life's challenges.  |       |   |   |          |   |   |          |   |   |    |
| Please describe how the spiritual conversations gathering helped you.   |       |   |   |          |   |   |          |   |   |    |
|   |       |   |   |          |   |   |          |   |   |    |

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