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## An Epistemology of Hope: A Modest Theory of Knowledge for the (Post) Evangelical Church

Jeffrey Norman Tacklind

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

AN EPISTEMOLOGY OF HOPE:  
A MODEST THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE FOR THE  
(POST)EVANGELICAL CHURCH

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

BY

JEFFREY NORMAN TACKLIND

NEWBERG, OREGON

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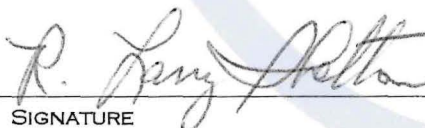
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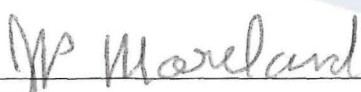
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**AN EPISTEMOLOGY OF HOPE:  
A MODEST THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE FOR THE  
(POST)EVANGELICAL CHURCH**

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LEADERSHIP IN THE EMERGING CULTURE DEGREE*

  
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From that point on, these ideas have been circulated around and around again with my friends, Paul Wolfe, Dale Fincher, Brad Coleman, Lars Rood and Jeremy Zach. These conversations have provided not only the stimulus to keep going, but also the reminder that this was more than mere speculation and something that could actually make a difference.

I would like to also thank my advisor, JP Moreland, whose openness to the leading of the Holy Spirit into new areas of theology and ministry have confirmed in my heart that God is truly uniting his people in unique ways.

I would also like to thank my parents for their constant support and affirmation. Most specifically a conversation with my mom where she told me to punch this thing as hard as I could. With all the skeptical looks I was receiving for my out of the box conclusions, this happened to be all the motivation I needed to see this thing through.

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## ABSTRACT

The problem that I will be addressing in this dissertation is the chasm that is growing between the evangelical church and the emerging church pertaining specifically to the epistemological differences between the two. My hope is to provide a theory of knowledge that will bridge the gap in such a way that it will preserve what I believe to be the virtues of both sides of the discussion. I will propose an epistemology that will hold to both the more evangelical commitment of an objective reality, while at the same time honestly facing the limitations to the modern quest for certainty. My goal is to demonstrate that an embracing of a modest epistemology will yield the fruit that is required for the church to effectively communicate the gospel to an emerging generation.

Chapter one focuses specifically on an issue of controversy that occurred at my church. The issue has to do with women's roles in leadership. As we approached this issue, I began to realize that much of what I was proposing for the emergent church in a new epistemology happened to pertain explicitly to the situation in which we found ourselves. I use this issue as a launching point to demonstrate that the epistemological conclusions that I suggest pertain to far more than the issues of the emergent church. And yet, effectively applying this epistemology to such a problem is an indication of what the world is longing for and what I truly believe it means to be an emergent church.

In chapter 2, I share a bit of my own story in light of my own transition away from a modern, fundamentalist background, but not without caution. In my experience with the emergent church, I find much that is quite liberating and restorative, and yet begin to see some pitfalls that must be avoided if we are to present a compelling answer for the reality of the hope of the gospel.

In chapter 3, I seek to understand the reality of living with uncertainty. My goal is to make a distinction between uncertainty and agnosticism, and to show that uncertainty, in reality, is an indication of greater depth and room to grow. It is not a preference for ignorance or darkness, but quite the opposite. The admission of uncertainty is to acknowledge that we are a part of something much bigger than ourselves.

Chapter 4 balances this uncertainty with the reality that there is truly something objective that is bigger than our own beliefs and conceptions. Reality is what we bump into when we are wrong. What does it mean to live in light of this reality? How do our claims for belief match up to this reality?

In chapter 5, I explore the epistemology we've inherited from modernism in Cartesian foundationalism as well as what it has evolved into in the coherentism embraced by many of the emergent scholars. I seek to find a middle ground between the two in a moderate foundationalism that acknowledges our limitations to certainty and yet preserves our commitment to a correspondence theory of truth.

Chapter 6 is an exploration of the philosophy of Michael Polanyi. In this chapter, my hope is to use his understanding of personal knowledge to bridge the gap between objectivity and subjectivity, and to demonstrate an epistemology that will allow for discovery and forward movement. It is in Polanyi's philosophy that I believe we find the forward thinking and hope befitting of our gospel message.

Chapter 7 focuses on the incomprehensibility of God. The goal for this chapter is to display that God's character and depth are not ever to be fully grasped, but instead will always draw us further into the depths of Himself. The vastness of God's character

provides comfort that He is not the result of our own minds and imaginations, but is a mind and being beyond complete humanity's comprehension.

Chapter 8 looks at the book of 1 Corinthians as a model of a similar sort of epistemology being laid out by Paul. The reality is that a modest epistemology that embraces both unity and diversity is nothing new. In this chapter I seek to identify Paul's commitments to orthodox truth, diversity, humility, and above all, charity.

Chapters 9, 10, and 11 seek to identify the character required to carry out this epistemological vision, and to pragmatically spell out just what it will look like. I examine ways that my own church is grappling with the manifesting of this epistemology, including the symposium that we hosted regarding the initial issue of women in ministry. I conclude the dissertation with values that I believe are derivative from the modest epistemology I have suggested and provide an answer that is being sought after by the emerging, post-evangelical movement.

## INTRODUCTION

### **The Problem**

“So, what do you propose?” The congregational meeting was coming up, and there was no question the issue would be raised. If the elders were caught off guard this time, they would have no one to blame but themselves. The issue had to be addressed.

“The elders already reviewed this issue Jeff, almost ten years ago. Do we really need to open this can of worms again? All it will cause is more division. All that will happen is that we will be forced to draw a line and some people will feel the need to leave the church.”

Jeff knew this was a real possibility. He also knew the church wasn’t quite at such a desperate place just yet. The issue being raised had to do with the roles of women in church leadership. Three questions specifically, could women be ordained, could they preach from the pulpit, and could they hold the office of elder? These questions had been raised at the previous two congregational meetings, but the intensity behind the questions was growing. People weren’t feeling heard. They felt like the issues were being avoided. As the mistrust between the congregation and the leadership grew, so did the potential volatility.

“We need to step into this with intentionality and integrity,” said Jeff. “We need to act like adults. This is a congregationally governed church and we’re talking about constitutional bylaws. The congregation is responsible for decisions of this level of importance. We cannot keep this at an elder level without looking like we’re hiding something. We need to handle this as a body.”

“But who is better suited to tackle questions of this theological depth than the elders? We are the ones who have studied this. The congregation isn’t educated enough to make a good decision.”

“Then part of our plan needs to be educational. How do we intentionally step into this controversial issue in such a way that people are drawn together, that the authority of Scripture is validated, and that leads us, as a body, closer to an understanding of truth?”

### **The Bigger Issue**

This is not a fictional story, but the actual situation I found myself in at the two-year mark of this Doctorate of Ministry program. I had begun this program with the desire to develop an epistemology for the emerging church that would avoid the modernistic pitfalls of strong foundationalism and its obsession with certainty, but would also preserve a firm confidence and commitment to objective truth and reality. My hunch was that the issues underlying most of the disputes between modern evangelicals and emergent, post-evangelicals were the result of misunderstandings and misperceptions resulting from an inability to think with maturity through issues of complexity and diversity. There were too many triggers along the way and too many knee jerk responses.

But if Christians in general could learn to process knowledge and belief in a way that was a bit more open-handed, then maybe we could actually get past the arguing and engage with the *person* on the other side of the issue. Maybe there was a middle road, an epistemology that could affirm the commitments of evangelicals and the values of the emerging church movement.

As the issue of women in ministry arose at our church, I began to realize that there were many similarities between the dilemma our church was facing in our current debate and the growing chasm between modern and postmodern Christians being discussed by the church at large. Similarly, people were talking past one another in both issues. The issue was being reduced to propositional beliefs, and removed from a relational context. People weren't feeling heard and valued. We were beginning to see the same unhealthy fruit of suspicion, contentiousness, and scorn happening at our church that was being seen everywhere else in the church at large and online in these debates.

I became convinced that our church, our entire church, needed to learn how to think differently. We needed a new epistemology. One that would bear the unity and diversity that Paul describes in his analogy of the church as Christ's body. How can we, as a body, engage in potentially divisive discussions without the fear of dismemberment? How do we avoid becoming churches of all hands, eyes, or feet? How do we avoid the false unity that comes with homogeneity?

As I sought outside advice, what I received back was almost entirely cautionary. Over and over I heard pastors say, "This never turns out well in the end," or "you're going to have to simply pick a side and let those that disagree go on their way." I finally said to a good friend, "if our church cannot manage this situation, and learn to rise above our differences, I'm going to have to toss out my dissertation." I still firmly believe that, at the heart of these matters, misconceptions with our understanding of truth are preventing the body of Christ from functioning properly. We desperately need to reexamine our conceptions of truth and knowledge. My belief is that the way forward for the church today lies in these epistemological questions.

### **The Symposium: Epistemology in Praxis**

The issue of women's roles did arise at our next congregational meeting, and before answering the question; our senior pastor shot me a quick look of "thanks." He then proceeded to describe our goal to host a symposium on the topic of women in ministry. We would invite several speakers representing the diverse spectrum of biblical interpretations, but remaining within the constraints of our doctrinal statement of beliefs and the generous boundaries of the Evangelical Free Denomination. (Although the denomination has taken a hard line on its own ordination policies, limiting this only to males, it does allow for women to serve without denominational ordination in the position of both elder and senior pastor and for women to preach from the pulpit.)

We would also put together an even broader range of papers to hand out to our congregation in preparation of the day, along with a page of the most relevant scripture passages in the discussion. As the day approached, we encouraged over and over again the significance of the participation of the entire body in this symposium. We affirmed the greater issues of love and unity and the potential for God to do something very significant in our midst.

But many had their doubts. As the day drew closer, I began to hear the fears and criticisms being expressed more and more vocally. This was no small issue. It was rooted for many in early childhood experiences and dogma that they had never questioned. There was considerable worry caused by confrontation with one's own ignorance of the issues, and the inevitable defensive responses inherently triggered by such concerns. My confidence was beginning to wane.



During this time I was reading diligently from the book of 1 Corinthians. As I read Paul words, over and over again, I found myself convinced of the fact that we were made to handle such disputes. In fact, that learning how to think and process through these kinds of issues was vital not only for our own spiritual formation, but for the churches ability to fulfill the work of the kingdom and for the gospel to truly be seen as light in darkness.

One of the ways that the church displays such light is in the fullness of unity in diversity and diversity in unity. Part of the goal for the symposium was to provide a picture of what this unity and diversity looks like on the panel of selected speakers. Our four speakers we chose represented the spectrum between a complementarian and an egalitarian perspective on the issues of women's roles in leadership. The complementarians selected were Dr. Robert Saucy, and Dr. Judith TenElshof, and the egalitarian's were Dr. Walt Liefeld and Dr. Ron Pierce. The four of them represented an enormous combined investment in the subject matter. Each of them possessed the character and greater values that the spirit of the day required. On the phone ahead of time, Walt Liefeld, who is in his eighties, said that he had never taken part in an event like this at a church that wasn't in serious crisis.

The day was significantly well attended, and I was pleased to see that we had filled our sanctuary. As I stood up to introduce the morning, I reminded the congregation that we were there to pursue truth and knowledge, we were there to educate ourselves, but not for knowledge's sake.<sup>1</sup> Without love, the day would be reduced to a noisy, clanging cymbal. This was an opportunity above the immediate discussion, for us to

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<sup>1</sup> My introduction and the symposium in its entirety can be found at [www.lagunachurchbythesea.org/womeninministry/](http://www.lagunachurchbythesea.org/womeninministry/)

practice what it means to be the body of Christ. As Paul says to Timothy, “But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”<sup>2</sup>

### **An Epistemology for the (Post)Modern Church**

Although I believe the issue of women in ministry is a very significant issue for the church today, it is not the specific issue that I am interested in addressing for this dissertation. In fact, the symposium we did could have been on any topic of controversy that divides a particular church or the church at large; Spiritual gifts, for instance, or one’s view on the millennium. The symposium gave our church the opportunity to put into practice a new epistemology, a new way of looking at truth. Instead of seeing unquestionable positions that had to be defended at all costs, we began to embrace a fuller picture of authority, reason, scripture, and experience. We began to do it in a way that revealed a greater depth behind the issues and a greater appreciation for those who thought differently.

My goal in this dissertation is to flesh out this epistemology both biblically and philosophically, and to seek to understand a bit of the history that has brought the church to the place it is now. I want to suggest this epistemology is not really something new, but instead a way of getting back on track with the freedom of the gospel message as well as the revelation and light it sheds on true, spiritual reality.

This dissertation started out of a desire to provide a middle road between the modern evangelical church and what is being referred to as the post-evangelical, post-modern, or emergent church. It is truly an issue that is close to my heart, and one that I believe is critical for the church to address together. Unfortunately, as is the case with so

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Timothy 1:5

many issues, this movement has become isolated and conversations have been reduced to shots being taken from opposing sides. However, I believe that until we are willing to address the epistemology that is under-girding our positions on both sides, any discussion inevitably becomes factious.

Why is the issue epistemological? For so long, postmodernism has been equated with a particular philosophical perspective, which is certainly a dimension of what is happening in culture, but hardly encompasses the enormity of the situation. Nor does it particularly clarify the heart of the issue. The problem as the evangelical church has perceived it, is largely the threat of moral relativism-an “anything goes” approach to life. This has been seen as a threat to Christendom, and much of the discussion leading up to this point is some variation of the theme of digging in one’s heels.

Books like Barna’s *Revolutions* have been extremely helpful in bringing the enormity of the problem into the mainstream, evangelical radar in terms that can be understood...numbers and statistics. Even if there still exists quite diverse and incongruent perspectives on what is happening in culture today, at least we are beginning to realize that if things remain the same, we are going to be ill prepared for the future.

My thinking is that if the evangelical church at large is unable to discuss this matter with any sort of hope for compromise, then how can it expect to move forward with any confidence into the future? Though we are a long way from any real answers, I feel like I’m beginning to see a general level of recognition amongst pastors that the climate of the church today is changing and, without readjustment, things are only going to get worse.

I believe that dialogue, similar to our churches symposium, will be one of the best ways that we, as a church, can prepare ourselves to weather this cultural storm. The virtue of compromise is one that is so often missed, but seems to me a crucial element towards a true spirit of unity in the church to face the future.

I think it is interesting to see the response of the church to the word compromise. It is almost as if this is the very thing the church has grown accustomed to fighting against. Compromise means giving ground. It means a weakening of our position. It means that we don't care about truth. It means that anything goes.

Given the church's embracing of strong foundationalism over the past couple of hundred years, it isn't surprising that each church is clinging to an unquestionable foundation. However, the immense diversity of these absolute foundations is just one of the obvious evidences that, even among evangelicals, there exists a vast diversity when it comes to our beliefs.

When we are looking from the inside, we can so easily become myopic and fail to see what is blindingly obvious to those on the outside. We see Christianity as a coherent and sensible belief system with an obvious answer to the humanity's problems. In reality, the world sees Christianity as being filled with more problems than answers. How can we claim to be a relevant answer to humanity's dilemmas when we can't admit the fact that we might not have it all figured out? We can't even discuss it without fighting and belittling each other. I believe that in order for the church to be effective it needs to display a change of heart, to eat some humble pie and to acknowledge that we have a long way to go.

I believe that it is vital for the church to understand this if it is going to have an effective witness to the culture we find ourselves in. The world is well aware of our infighting, and it becomes one of the greatest apologetics against the truth of the Gospel. If Christians hold each other in such contempt, how do we expect to give a compelling answer for the hope that is in us? However, if the church is able to grasp the fullness of this understanding of truth, it has the potential to lead us forward into a deeper manifestation of the love of God as it is revealed in the true community that comes from believers of diversity dwelling together in love and unity.

I recently read a response from Chuck Smith, the founder of the Calvary Chapel movement, against the emergent church movement. I couldn't help thinking how painful it must have been for his son, Chuck Smith Jr., an outspoken crier for the emergent church, to hear those words from his father. I believe the tension that we are feeling in the church has a very similar fragility to the tension between this father and son. As a son longs for the affirmation of his father and the permission to step forward into maturity, the father possesses enormous power and responsibility. But what does a father do if he doesn't see eye to eye with his son? Does he withhold his blessing? At what cost to the son? To himself? To the Gospel itself?

One of the things that I am so fearful of is the evangelical church disowning the emergent church. I see this happening with Calvary Chapel, I see this happening at my previous church of employment, and I read about this in my seminary's alumni magazine. The emergent church is being labeled as a group of rebellious young pastors that sneer at doctrine. While I believe that this is a gross misrepresentation, it is not to say that there isn't reason for caution and concern from evangelicals about this movement.

Without guidance, the emergent church will inevitably succumb to its own blind spots and naïve idealisms. But if a middle ground could be found, the emergent conversation might do more than just add some breadth to the theological discussion. It might hold some critical pieces for the entire church in effectively connecting with the postmodern culture we find ourselves in.

Existing churches need to not miss this. Failing to empower one's children creates tension and rebellion and is stunting to everyone's growth. On the other hand, to stand alongside them because of a deep sense of loyalty and commitment is incredibly empowering. I think that if the church is able to understand this, then we will be far better equipped to weather the cultural storm, even to thrive in it. We might even establish a vision for empowering a generation that is yet to come.

### ***It Has Already Begun***

What I personally find so motivating about the emergent church is the way diversity is being manifested within church bodies. This blending of diverse approaches to worship, liturgy, spiritual gifts, etc. has become one of the healthiest manifestations of the hope of the gospel to myself and so many others. It is happening all over the globe. I am convinced that this is something that God is doing, and the world is noticing. A recent article in *U.S. News and World Report* said this specifically on the blending of new and old liturgical practices in the emerging church:

Something curious is happening in the wide world of faith, something that defies easy explanation or quantification. More substantial than a trend but less organized than a movement, it has to do more with how people practice their religion than with what they believe, though people caught up in this change often find that their beliefs are influenced, if not subtly altered, by the changes in their practice.

Put simply, the development is a return to tradition and orthodoxy, to past practices, observances, and customary ways of worshiping. But it is not simply a return to the past—at least not in all cases. Even while drawing on deep traditional resources, many participants are creating something new within the old forms. They are engaging in what Penn State sociologist of religion Roger Finke calls "innovative returns to tradition."

You see this at work quite clearly in the so-called emergent communities, new, largely self-organizing groups of young Christian adults who meet in private homes, church basements, or coffeehouses around the country. So free-form that many don't even have pastors, these groups nevertheless engage in some ancient liturgical practices, including creedal declarations, public confession, and Communion. They may use a piece of a bagel as the body of Christ, but the liturgy is a traditional anchor in services that may include films, skits, or group discussions of a biblical topic.<sup>3</sup>

Another noticeable area of strength is in the blending of the charismatic gifts and worship with an increased hunger for doctrine and biblical knowledge. These two areas have so often been at odds, to the point of questioning outright the very salvation of the opposing camp. I see philosophy professors and Vineyard pastors coming together to teach each other and learn from each other. I think this is a huge step for both out of their respective comfort zones. The courage required is inspiring. When I see men like Dallas Willard and JP Moreland taking part in healings and condoning the prophetic voice of God today, and the Anaheim Vineyard having apologetics classes, I am incredibly inspired. What a picture of God at work. He is breaking down huge barriers and uniting believers.

Another area of strength I feel is the return to the church fathers and the increased desire for spiritual formation. People are searching further back, reexamining much of our heritage, and taking part in contemplative practices that my upbringing shunned as too Catholic. The uniting that is happening between Protestants and Catholics is of great

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.usnews.com/articles/news/national/2007/12/13/a-return-to-tradition.html>

significance. Our willingness to enter back into discussion and to consider each other Christians is another sign of what I believe needs to take place in the church. It is a compromise in the name of unity and I think it is the very thing others need to see. The world has seen our lack of it for years and has rightly shaken its head in dismay.

What is exciting about both of these is that there is evidence that this is something that God is doing. One of the clearest evidences that I have seen and heard about is how people of opposing views have had an encounter or experience with God that radically altered their paradigms and theologies. God has targeted strategic people in order to allow for diversity to flourish, people that have come to symbolize one view are becoming spokespersons for the opposing viewpoint. I rejoice at these evidences as God is using transformed lives to bring a fullness to the body of Christ by creating such wonderful tension.

But we clearly have a long way to go. Two things that I see often working against the church's mission are fear and control. These two things are so interrelated. They are always lurking underneath our decisions and responses. They affect our reactions and create so much of the discord that happens between churches. We fear what we can't control. When we see signs of the storm we either want to run and hide, go on the offensive, or act like it isn't happening at all. Either way gives off the illusion that we can somehow avoid the conflict and exist in our current state of harmony.

I mentioned that the discussion is beginning to happen, but I often wonder if we will be able to move past this stage. It is going to cost everyone something and I am not sure that everyone is willing to accept the cost. What I fear most is that those with power will be reticent to give it up. If those in control aren't willing to come to the table



humbly, looking eye to eye with their peers, then we are in trouble. Those in control need to be willing to lose some of it. We need to dialogue in such a way that we can stand by and support those that are advocating change, without knocking the legs out from under them. We all need to become ‘emergent’ in our thinking in that we are all open to seeing the church move forward.

### ***Finding a Middle Road***

My goal in this dissertation will be to suggest an epistemology that will, I believe, provide both the understanding and the character to allow for true dialogue and unity to begin on both sides of the conversation. It is not the unity of conformity, but instead, an epistemology that encourages diversity, is comfortable with uncertainty, and understands the value of both mystery and knowledge.

I believe that this epistemology provides a middle road between modern foundationalism, and postmodern coherentism. It is a modest, moderate view that I feel embodies both our commitment to truth and reality, as well as a posture of humility and the potential for greater depth. While it is certainly not the final answer, I believe that it provides a way forward for the entire Christian church that will allow for us to continue to grow and mature into the fulfillment of God’s vision for the church.

## CHAPTER 2

### MY (POST)MODERN JOURNEY

#### **My Loss of Faith in Church Leadership**

The book, *God's Advocates*, by Rupert Shortt is composed of interviews with some of the top minds in Christian thought, and provides a glimpse into some of the formative elements in the lives of these individuals. One in particular, David Martin on Christianity and Society, spoke quite openly about his autobiographical approach to writing and the revealing of his own evolution along with his particular subject matter. Martin states, "In my case the autobiographical clues lie in two losses of faith, the first being a loss of faith in the biblical literalism of my parents, and the second a loss of faith in political idealism."<sup>4</sup>

I can relate, although I feel that, personally, my second loss of faith was related much more to the ideal of Christian leadership, than politics. I grew up in the church and had many different leaders that inspired me to live more Christian-like. I had youth pastors that were larger than life, pastors that would bring me to tears, both of joy and conviction, and mentors that inspired me to live life more fully. But over the years, I saw a startling number of them not only fail morally, but abandon the church and even their own faith. I remember thinking that if these guys were unable to live out their faith, as gifted and convincing as they were, then what confidence did I have to do any better?

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<sup>4</sup> Rupert Shortt, *God's Advocates*, (Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 153.

## **My First Ministry Exposure**

My response was to seek to surpass them in their stature as leaders. I would have to be more inspiring, exhibit more character, and be a better man. I became involved in leadership programs in the church and during my summers in college, I became an avid reader of Christian literature, and I led a small group and eventually supervised the youth ministry at my church before I turned 18. I eventually worked at a large camp, Forest Home, which had always been my idealistic vision growing up of what leadership should look like...successful, cool, and high energy.

During my summers at Forest Home I became what I had always held as the ideal and was recognized as that by the churches in Orange County. But instead of a sense of success and security, I remember feeling more scared about my faith and beliefs. I knew that what people were responding to was a tiny slice of who I really was that was being taken and stretched bigger than I could ever hope to be. I read a quote from Einstein once where he said, "I'm no Einstein." On a much more modest scale, I found myself relating to those words, thinking, "I'm no Jeff Tacklind."

I went from there to Fullerton EV Free Church, a fairly large church in Orange County. My role at the church was simply a carryover of what I had been doing during the summers at Forest Home, but now it began to spill over into all areas of my life. I was reaching a summit that I had been striving for and was all of a sudden struck with the realization that there was very little substance behind the image I was continually striving to protect and project. And it wasn't just me. I could see the disillusionment happening in the lives of my co-pastors and also witnessed several of them removed from ministry for "moral" reasons. From my perspective, they had simply run out of energy. They were

exhausted by the effort required to perpetuate the myth of leadership that we had all grown up believing in.

It is my belief and experience that the church in America is deeply connected to a very humanistic set of ideals that go directly against the picture of leadership that Jesus demonstrated. I believe that we've latched on to this because of a subtle (or not so subtle) embracing of a modernistic ideology of success and efficiency that requires a modernistic picture of leadership in order to be successful. We put forth our best and brightest as a demonstration of the effectiveness of the product we are selling.

I've now spent the last 12 years ministering in what many believe to be the heartland of "modern" evangelicalism, Orange County, CA. This is the world of high profile ministry; slick, efficient, and larger than life.

I began rethinking my philosophy of ministry within the context of a ministry that was becoming, in my estimation, more and more cold and impersonal in its efficiency and presentational focus. The problem was that often the character qualities and virtues we sought to model focused most prominently on external appearances and talents; how to look like a Christian that has it all together. Those that didn't fit in or live up to the standards inevitably fell by the wayside.

In other words, the worth we found in others depended on how closely they matched the image we were presenting. I was reminded of this when reading Phillip Ball's description of Hume's leviathan in *Critical Mass*. He says, "The Value, or WORTH of a man, is as of all other things, his price; that is to say, so much as would be

given for the use of his Power.”<sup>5</sup> Those of us who fit the mold found ourselves with tremendous power and therefore worth. Those that didn’t, didn’t.

As I began to share my concerns with other staff, I realized that I was breaking a cardinal rule. You didn’t question the system, at least not if you expect to last. Besides, numbers were on the rise. Who was I to raise such questions?

In my heart I felt we were doing something significantly wrong. We were creating an unattainable, hyper-real *image* of Christianity that was certainly marketable, but was feeling increasingly superficial. The inconsistency I experienced between my own emerging intuitions and that which I was taking part in was stifling not only to my ministry, but to my desires even to attend church.

Quite a bit has happened in the last few years to not only renew, but to reawaken passions and optimism for church ministry. Much of it has to do with finding a small, team led church that has allowed my wife and me to fully engage in the life of the body and to see ministry done with humility and grace, without sacrificing true creativity and quality. Yet much of my spiritual renewal I would also credit to the likes of Brian McLaren, Dallas Willard, and others who have bravely offered new ideas and conceptions of ministry, often in the face of much opposition from those whose system is potentially threatened.

I say all this in the hopes of communicating not only my support for the Emergent Church movement, but also to express my intentions of making a contribution from within, not a critique from without. There’s been enough of that. As I raise some personal concerns, it is out of a desire to move things forward, not hold them ba

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<sup>5</sup> Ball, Phillip, *Critical Mass*, (New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), 24.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE VIRTUE OF UNCERTAINTY

#### **The Illusion of Indubitable Certainty**

I recently was listening to a radio program titled, “What’s So Dangerous About the Emerging Church” where prominent minister, John MacArthur, described the emergent church movement as “an amorphous, loose knit association of churches that have decided that there is value and virtue in the uncertainty of scripture.” Leave it to a guy like MacArthur to get right at the heart of a movement that has been incredibly difficult to define, even by its own. In many ways, I think MacArthur nailed it right on the head. This issue of uncertainty seems to be the deciding issue of whether you love or hate the emergent church. It is the issue that polarizes the discussion into two camps, those who experience liberation from a stifling sense of certainty and those who are completely destabilized by the looming threat of relativism.

How one comes to understand the relationship between certainty and truth is a huge determinant in where someone lands on this issue of comfortability with uncertainty. The definition of certainty is a simple one, but becomes more and more complex as it is unpacked. It is defined as “a conclusion or outcome that is beyond doubt.” But this can be taken in either a psychological or epistemological direction. On a psychological level, certainty is a feeling or confidence or assurance. While these feelings are definitely significant in determining how we act and respond, they are hardly a strong qualifier for truth claims. Feelings are fallible, and often misguided. They can be simply a reflection of ignorance or of subconscious paranoia. The point is not to render

psychological certainty as superfluous, but when asking questions of the nature of reality, the certainty that provides justification for knowledge requires more than just inner feeling of confidence.

Epistemic certainty goes beyond the question of doubt, and asks instead whether or not a belief or proposition is properly warranted or justified. To what extent a belief needs to be justified in order to qualify as knowledge is much debated. However, there are two prominent camps on the issue of certainty. The first is referred to as Cartesian certainty, and the second is most often ascribed to Roderick Chisholm. Chisholm's view of epistemic certainty is that a proposition is epistemically certain "provided no proposition is more warranted than it."<sup>6</sup> This means that there may be legitimate reasons for doubting the belief, but that the reasons justifying it outweigh the doubts. The Cartesian view requires not only reasons warranting the proposition, but also that there "are no legitimate grounds whatsoever for doubting it."

There is no question that Cartesian certainty offers a much stronger form of knowledge than Chisholm's. In fact, much of the modern project since Descartes has been seeking for ways to hold on to Cartesian certainty. The epistemological model of strong foundationalism that Descartes developed is entirely reliant upon this level of certainty. James Wood states, "The position that has come to be termed 'strong foundationalism' or 'classical foundationalism' attempts to meet the uncertainty generated by liability to error and disagreement in the strongest possible terms: by grounding our entire edifice of knowledge on invincible certainty. The best way of halting the regress of reason giving is to have it stop in beliefs about which it is

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Audi, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995), 113.

impossible for us to be in error.”<sup>7</sup> Descartes said that the foundation for one’s noetic structure must be self-justifying and immune from any form of doubt. Another word for this sort of certainty would be indubitability. I think much of western culture has given up on this level of certainty. As Wood states, “the strong foundationalist program of Descartes and others has suffered from the unrelenting criticisms of a host of detractors, culminating in the twentieth century with the alleged death of the foundationalist enterprise.”<sup>8</sup>

Though the detractors of foundationalism represent a significant majority of the academic world, much of the Christian world today still seems to hold to Descartes’ foundationalist epistemology and the belief that knowledge of truth requires that one can attain indubitable certainty for one’s spiritual beliefs. Whether the foundation is the Bible for the fundamentalists or special revelation for the liberals, it is foundationalism nonetheless. Nancey Murphy states:

If theology must have a solid foundation, a natural direction to turn was to Scripture, and here one will be driven rationally toward an inerrantist account of its truth. I have also described some of the factors that led liberal theologians to seek a deeper level of support in religious experience and have claimed that the foundationalist theory led them, further, to seek for a peculiar sort of experience, universal and unmediated.<sup>9</sup>

I will seek to explain this more in depth in chapter 5.

I believe that a large part of the development of the emergent church has come from a shifting within the church away from a strong foundationalist epistemology. This is what I believe Macarthur is getting at when he says that the emergent church embraces

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<sup>7</sup> W. Jay Wood, *Epistemology*, (Downers Grove, Illinois, Intervarsity Press, 1998), 83.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>9</sup> Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Foundationalism*, (Harrisburg, PN, Trinity Press International, 1996), 28.



uncertainty. What he really means is that the emergent church has given up on the quest for indubitable certainty. In this assertion, I think he is correct. Unfortunately, there exists no middle ground for certainty in Macarthur's worldview, and in much of evangelicalism. It is all or nothing. I believe a significant reason is that this notion of truth has become so engrained within the church's reasoning, that it is incapable of seeing anything less than indubitability as having any sort of truth-value.

In the same broadcast, when Macarthur mentioned that the emergent church embraces uncertainty he went on to restate this point as an embracing of mystery, but also, as an embracing of ignorance. What I see here is a complete lack of categories from which Macarthur, and many others, is able to draw distinctions in regards to truth. If it is impossible to have knowledge of truth without certainty, than I would agree that embracing uncertainty is an attack on truth. This is why he concludes that the root of the problem, and the motives behind the embracing of uncertainty, is actually a preference for darkness versus the light.

I disagree in his assumption that knowledge of truth requires certainty. I do agree, however, that the emergent church embraces uncertainty and mystery, but not for the reasons Macarthur assumes. His equating these two areas with ignorance is where I believe the misunderstanding lies and that this is where most of the work needs to be done in communicating the vision for the emergent church to the evangelical church at large. In this chapter, I hope to provide a clarification between uncertainty and agnosticism and to demonstrate how wonder at mystery is one of the things that compels us to search deeper and deeper into the depths of who God is.

## **Facing the Music**

In order to arrive at a place of comfortability with uncertainty it first requires the awkward transition of leaving behind the illusions of indubitability. This is not an easy thing to let go of. To acknowledge the possibility of legitimate doubt in basic beliefs causes cracks that spread to every area of belief. The feeling of desperation that follows can be incredibly destabilizing. If we can question everything, then what can we depend on? What will be our anchor in the midst of what appears to be unavoidable subjectivism and relativism?

There are several reasons that, I believe, make a level of uncertainty preferable to the absolutism of Cartesian certainty. The first is the problematic nature of strong foundationalism as an epistemology and the illusory nature of indubitability. However tantalizing this level of certainty might be, it is a project that continues to end, again and again in failure. Postmodernism has long given up this pursuit, and I believe that the church would be wise to follow its lead in this particular step. As Nicholas Wolterstorff stated, “On all fronts foundationalism is in bad shape. It seems to me there is nothing to do but give it up for mortally ill and learn to live in its absence.”<sup>10</sup>

Secondly, a level of uncertainty seems to match more closely with the obvious fallibility of humanity’s knowledge claims. I believe strongly in the fact that man is capable of having knowledge, not just beliefs, about reality. I believe that this reality is objective and self-presenting, allowing for direct perceptions of reality. However, I also believe that humanity’s senses can misguide him, and his expectations may deceive him regarding the nature of this reality. As a result, man must hold to a more modest theory of knowledge, without sacrificing the legitimacy of acquisition of truth.

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<sup>10</sup> Wood, *Epistemology*, 100.

Thirdly, I feel that absolute certainty has a level of finality to it that is stifling to the furthering of knowledge, whereas uncertainty allows for a continual fine-tuning of knowledge without making certain areas taboo. Because everything is susceptible to doubt, everything must be evaluated based on questions of warrant. This process is vital not only to furthering knowledge, but in justifying one's confidence and security in the veracity of one's beliefs. Rather than one foundation providing the support for the entire edifice, truth claims must work together to provide not only internal coherence, but to provide self-checking for multiple 'foundations' or connection points with reality itself.

I want to suggest that this level of uncertainty is not simply a flaw in the system, but that, in the end, it is God's desire not just to be known, but to be sought. He desires for us to be seekers after Him. We are told that He is the truth, and so the very pursuit of knowledge is relational. As in any relationship, stagnation destroys intimacy.

### **The Fallibility of Man**

"But what we suffer from today is humility in the wrong place. Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition. Modesty has settled upon the organ of conviction; where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed. Nowadays the part of a man that a man does assert is exactly the part he ought not to assert-himself. The part he doubts is exactly the part he ought not to doubt-the divine reason."<sup>11</sup>

If indubitable uncertainty is unattainable, what specifically is preventing it? This is an especially pertinent question for Christians, who hold that the world was created and designed by a perfect God. How much of the uncertainty that man faces is the result of the fall and the sinfulness that entered the world at that time, and how much of it is the result of an intentional withholding of knowledge from man by God?

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<sup>11</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, (New York, Doubleday, 1959), 31.

There are elements of both that have an effect on what we can know, but, in the end, is it possible for man to truly possess knowledge? Does God hold man responsible for the level of knowledge he possesses?

Scripture seems clear that man has no excuse for a lack of knowledge of God. As Romans states, “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”<sup>12</sup> Significant in this verse is the notion of clarity; that God has made it plain to them. Not only does this reflect a level of certainty based on God’s provision, but an accountability to it.

But what about the fact that we, as humans, often make mistakes and errors when it comes to basic beliefs like perceptions and in recollection of our memories? Reality is often distorted by our desires and our assumptions. Truly our senses often work reliably and one is justified in ascribing to them a high level of reliability, but often this is merely something we take for granted. Wood states, “There are no more basic, no more fundamental claims on which the general reliability of your conscious mind might be based. The buck stops here.”<sup>13</sup>

While the fallibility of the senses is a difficulty that any realist epistemology must face, I think Scripture points to an additional, and even more basic, source of humanity’s fallibility. Jesus often comments on the blindness and deafness of those that listen and don’t hear, and look but don’t see. His words speak to the very heart of man, and the

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<sup>12</sup> Romans 1:19 & 20

<sup>13</sup> Wood, *Epistemology*, 83.

receptivity to truth, or lack thereof. What is it in man that prevents his heart from seeing reality clearly?

Often, the lack of clarity is simply a choice of self-deception. When the discomfort of guilt grows too great to bear and the pleasure of sin makes us unwilling to repent, then we are left with little else, but to rationalize our actions away through creating a softer system or unfair comparisons of others. We may even be cognizant of doing this initially, but little by little we can easily slip into a distorted worldview where our sinful actions and attitudes seem righteous and just.

I believe that there are two causes for the dishonesty in humanity's hearts. The first is pride and the second, fear. Clearly a huge impact of the fall was the result of choosing humanity's power and control over God's. To this day, we are continually confronted with the seduction of being in control of our destiny and morality. We place ourselves at the center of reality and begin to see all truth and knowledge based on how it affects us. As a result, we objectify all knowledge, even relational knowledge. As Martin Buber puts it, we begin to see the world entirely as I-it vs. I-thou. A world of I-it becomes a world where love is impossible. It is a world of loneliness and isolation. It is only a matter of time before this heart atrophies and loses sensitivity to reality. It hardens and becomes incapable of seeing anything beyond itself.

As Paul states in 1 Corinthians, "Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him."<sup>14</sup>

The prideful heart is an untrustworthy heart. Although we have considerably more grace for the pride in ourselves than we do for the pride in others, most of us are acutely

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<sup>14</sup> 1 Cor. 8:1b-3

aware of the dishonesty within us. This lack of ability to trust others is unsettling, but even more so is the notion that we cannot trust ourselves. It is no wonder we live with such anxiety and discomfort over our beliefs. If we cannot depend on ourselves, whom can we depend on?

In order to cope with this fear, we gloss over the weak points or discrepancies in our own beliefs and focus on the flaws in other positions. Eventually, this can lead to an obsession with proving others wrong and us right. We mask our criticalness in virtue, and become protectors of the truth. We create systems of thought which we dedicate ourselves to defending. Our insecurity and doubt become clouded by overconfidence and defensiveness.

The dangers of this type of thinking are far reaching. Thomas Merton speaks directly to the destructive tendencies of humanity's self-distrust when he says, "When the whole world is in moral confusion: when no one knows any longer what to think, and when, in fact, everybody is running away from the responsibility of thinking, when man makes rational thought about moral issues absurd by exiling himself entirely from realities into the realm of fictions, and when he expends all his efforts in constructing more fictions with which to account for his ethical failures, then it becomes clear that the world cannot be saved from global war and global destruction by the mere efforts and good intentions of peacemakers."<sup>15</sup>

The tendency of Christians to go to war with other Christians is such a vivid image of how terribly we can miss the point. This veritable dishonesty of the heart is the

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas Merton, *Passion for Peace*, (New York, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1995), 27.

very thing that Jesus came to redeem. He saves us not only from the penalty of our sins, but also from ourselves.

### **The Hiddenness of God**

The danger of admitting humanity's fallibility is the possibility for the pendulum to swing into a crippling agnosticism. If humanity's knowledge is limited and even possibly flawed, how can he be expected to know anything? How can he be held accountable for his beliefs and actions?

I believe that human reason is oriented toward revealing the objective truth of things. I believe the Bible is clear that man is truly responsible for his beliefs and knowledge. As the verse in Romans mentioned earlier, God holds us accountable for understanding his power and character in the nature itself and that it is clearly seen. Jesus holds the Jewish people responsible for seeing that He fulfills the requirements and prophecies of the coming messiah based on their possession of the Scriptures. Paul praises the Bereans for their diligence in searching the Scriptures to test his words and to make sure the message of the gospel coheres properly with the Old Testament. All of these are indications that man has been given the tools and the capacity to attain truth.

But Scripture also makes it clear that man does not possess a complete understanding of truth. In fact, it says in Isaiah, "Truly, Thou are a God who hides Himself, O God of Israel, Savior!"<sup>16</sup>

There is much of the world and reality that God intentionally withholds. But it is clear from the passage that to those that seek, they will find. Scripture states this explicitly. Truth is disclosed to those who have the desire and dedication for it. The

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<sup>16</sup> Isa. 45:15

purposes behind the hiddenness of God are mysterious, and yet a crucial piece of understanding God's end purposes and designs for man. In a talk on the hiddenness of God, given by JP Moreland, he quoted Pascal as saying, "God being thus hidden every religion which does not affirm that God is hidden is not true and every religion which does not give the reason of it, is not instructive."<sup>17</sup>

### **Searching for God**

"God is no fonder of intellectual slackers than of any other slackers. If you are thinking of becoming a Christian, I warn you, you are embarking on something which is going to take the whole of you, brains and all. But, fortunately, it works the other way round. Anyone who is honestly trying to be a Christian will soon find his intelligence being sharpened: one of the reasons why it needs no special education to be a Christian is that Christianity is an education itself."<sup>18</sup>

As pastors and ministers, I believe that it is our primary task to equip the saints for the purpose of knowing truth and reality. One of my previous professors once said, "We need to be more committed to the truth than to Christianity." I believe that this is an essential realization for us to make and any uncomfortably we might feel at this statement should alert us to our tendency to build doctrine around what feels natural instead of what we've explored, tested and embraced.

I think that it is essential that we are not only providing our congregations with orthodox teaching, but that we are demonstrating and equipping them with the tools to

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<sup>17</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, (London, Penguin Books, 1995), 191.

<sup>18</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (New York, HarperCollins, 2001), 78.



become a part of the search. God has given us minds to think, wills to choose, and emotions to feel and experience Him. As Stanley Grenz stated:

Postmodern thinkers rightly alert us to the naïveté of the Enlightenment attempt to discover universal truth by appeal to reason alone. Ultimately the metanarrative we proclaim lies beyond the pale of reason either to discover or to evaluate. Therefore, we agree that in this world we will witness the struggle among conflicting narratives and interpretations of reality. But we add that although all interpretations are in some sense invalid, they cannot all be equally invalid. We believe that conflicting interpretations can be evaluated according to a criterion that in some sense transcends them all. Because we believe that ‘the Word became flesh’ in Jesus Christ, we are convinced that this criterion is the story of God’s action in Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>19</sup>

How are we leading people into intimate knowledge of their creator and savior? I believe that this should be done gently and with discretion. I am not advocating a reckless dismantling of certainty, but rather a more responsive guidance into the depths of God, as questions are asked and as the complexities of life come to the surface. This means that we, as teachers, must provide more than a finished product, but allow our process and the messiness of our lives be more transparent.

How important it is that our congregations see us wrestle through our own fears and doubts. There must be less polish and more spit. When we allow for others to walk this road with us, then our primary form of discipleship becomes praxis. They are able to see how we make connections, how we learn, and how we grow, and hopefully to begin to see and do the same for themselves.

This approach allows for new and wonderful discovery in our pursuit of God. The Holy Spirit leads us into the depths of God’s character. New revelation is brought forth and old revelation gains new light. Doubts and fears are confronted with honesty and vulnerability. I believe that this is the life we were made for. As Elton Trueblood writes:

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<sup>19</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 165.

Always be ready to change. There is nothing wrong with changing, but there is a great deal wrong with holding onto a position that is unintelligent, unrealistic, or irrational.

Note that the Christian does not claim that God can be proved absolutely. No Christian has ever claimed that, and no Christian has ever claimed that God can be seen with physical eyes; it isn't that simple. We cannot absolutely prove that God is... What we can do, however, is to find a position that makes sense, that brings together the many aspects of experience of which we are aware. This is what the Christian tries to do as he or she thinks. Christians are never afraid of new evidence. They are not afraid of being questioned. In fact, Christians gladly accept questioning, because they have a story to tell.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Elton Trueblood, *A Life of Search*, (Richmond, Indiana, Friends United Press, 1996), 4.

## CHAPTER 4

### COMING TO GRIPS WITH REALITY

#### **What is Reality?**

What is reality? This is one of the greatest philosophical questions of all time, and one with far reaching implications. It concerns both the nature of truth and the accessibility of truth. At no period in time has this question seemed more relevant and more urgent than today. Nor have opinions felt more diversified.

I am a pastor in the town of Laguna Beach, the home one of MTV's most recent reality based television program, "Laguna Beach, The Real OC". The show follows the lives of several teenagers in town who live a celebrity-like existence of wealth, materialism, popularity and romance. Their 'reality' has become the fascination of kids all around the world, and MTV does an excellent job in finding the delicate balance necessary to create an enticing illusion of reality and fantasy.

Interestingly enough, the show was interrupted in its second season by a landslide that occurred in Bluebird Canyon, in the middle of Laguna. A large number of multimillion-dollar homes began collapsing upon themselves as the crumbling hillside disappeared underneath them.

We live in a world where reality can mean just about whatever we want it to mean. We are able to define who we are, how we are viewed, who we are becoming, all through the incredible resources, wealth, and technology at our finger tips. Our illusion becomes the reality, and the illusion seems better than the real thing.

But there is a different kind of reality. It is reality with a capital R. This kind of Reality isn't something that we shape, but that shapes us. I've heard Dallas Willard refer

to this reality as “What we bump into when we’re wrong.” We often live much of our lives trying desperately to ignore this Reality. Sometimes it takes a landslide to remind us that it is there. What do we do when Reality comes crashing in? Winfried Corduan writes:

...there is some kind of reality that is constituted independently of what we say about it. In other words, either my car is in the parking lot or not; either the geometry of right triangles follows the Pythagorean theorem or not; either God exists or He does not. This reality is a given. Our statements are true if they correspond to the reality in question; they are false if they do not correspond. We call this the correspondence theory of truth...<sup>21</sup>

A man in my church, Dale Ghere, was awake at 6 a.m. on the morning of the landslide. His wife shouted from the shower downstairs that the water pressure was low. Dale checked the water upstairs, and found the same low pressure. Then the electricity went out. Dale had been the victim of a previous landslide that happened in Laguna in 1978. Recognizing the signs, he ran out into the surrounding neighborhood and began knocking on doors and shouting to the people to evacuate their homes. A modern day Paul Revere, he went from house to house until the entire Bluebird canyon neighborhood was out of their homes, just as the full strength of the slide was beginning. Miraculously, the only injury suffered in a slide that should have had numerous casualties, was an injured foot from someone who stepped on a cactus as they fled their home.

What impresses me with this example are both the faculties that allowed Dale to accurately predict the coming disaster, and the courage and wherewithal to take the appropriate heroic action to get everyone to safety.

I think that, in many ways, we as pastor’s are a part of a similar type of calling. It requires an understanding of spiritual truth and reality in such an intimate way that we are

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<sup>21</sup> Corduan, Winfried, *Reasonable Faith: Basic Christian Apologetics*, (Baptist Sunday School Board), 39.

able to make accurate predictions for others and courageously help them take the appropriate actions in light of this greater picture of spiritual reality.

What faculties do we possess that allow us to find and pursue reality?

Experience, reason, and authority, are crucial, but also one's character and virtue play a significant role in the pursuit of truth. How we use these resources will determine how clearly we see and respond to reality. My hope in this chapter is to provide some direction that will allow for us to find, not only a better definition of reality, but how to attain to a more full understanding of what it means to live in light of this reality. I will suggest three character qualities that I believe are crucial for our epistemology if we are going to see reality as it is. They are honesty, humility, and courage, in that order.

### **Knowledge of Reality**

I was watching the Pixar short, 'Knick Knack', with my son one morning. This is the one with the calypso music playing in the background while a snow man in a snow globe is desperately trying to escape from his confinement to join the rest of the knick knacks on the shelf, especially the pretty ceramic girl sitting next to a pool/ashtray. He tries everything from a jackhammer, to a blowtorch, and finally dynamite, which sends his snow globe plummeting off the shelf. As he is descending rapidly, he notices an escape hatch on the bottom that had been covered by the artificial snow in the globe. He opens it and jumps to freedom, only to land in a fishbowl on a lower shelf. On the bright side, there is a ceramic mermaid inside, but just as he begins to advance toward her his snow globe splashes into the fishbowl and just so happens to trap him back inside of it. Foiled again.

Watching this for what felt like the fortieth time with Gabe, it struck me that there was really something deep in this short film. Who can't relate in some way with the snowman? All of us experience feelings of separation and isolation. All of us experience disconnection. I am again reminded of Ludwig Wittgenstein's comment that we are all flies in a bottle. In his words, the very purpose of philosophy was to free man from this solitary confinement.

Whether or not Wittgenstein ever succeeds, our snowman does find a way out, only to land in a larger bowl, which seems to beg the question, how many of these transparent bowls exist? Does one ever really "escape"? Can we ever get to the outside world, to reality? Is there even such a thing? Are we stuck simply with sense data, or can we actually get to something objective beyond our senses? If so, how far does this reality go?

Answering this question is commonly done by placing limitations on what humanity can know. Certainly we can believe things as far as we'd like, but what humanity can have actual knowledge of is limited by humanity's perceptions, experience, and faculties. The 'Knick Knack' example gives us two obvious stopping points where humanity has traditionally limited this range of knowledge. I will use the snow globe to represent the self, the mind, humanity's internal thoughts and consciousness. The Second, the fishbowl, I will use to represent the material world or the cosmos.

If reality is limited to the snow globe, then we find ourselves in a predicament commonly referred to as solipsism. Basically, one can only be sure of one's own existence. Knowledge beyond the snow globe (one's senses) is impossible. Although this view is often toyed with and leads to some interesting movies, such as *The Matrix*, it

seems like this sort of worldview is pretty difficult to live out pragmatically and is unverifiable philosophically.

I believe that it is far more common for humanity to limit reality to the fishbowl. There is a reality beyond the self, but it is confined by what is often referred to as the cosmos or the material world. In the words of Karl Sagan, “The cosmos is all there is, was, and ever will be.” This worldview is referred to as naturalism or materialism.

But what about a spiritual realm? Why would so many philosophers, scientists, and atheists discount the possibility of spiritual knowledge, especially when humanity has, for thousands of years, believed in its presence and in its knowability?

### **Varying Levels of Confidence**

I think that there are two dimensions to humanity’s restriction of knowledge to the self or the cosmos. The first is the difficulty of attaining the sort of certainty that we seem to be able to possess within our own selves, and within a world that is testable and verifiable. We have personal access and knowledge of our selves that is direct and that we alone have private access to. Through our senses and faculties we have less direct contact with the world around us. Our senses are fallible and we can certainly misperceive reality, but it still remains testable through scientific research and verifiability. However, the spiritual realm seems to be outside the realms of classical science and therefore is often reduced to the classification of belief versus knowledge. It could be argued that as we move from the self to the cosmos, and from the cosmos to the spiritual realm, we lose a certain degree of certainty and our beliefs call for a greater amount of agnosticism with each step away from ourselves.

## *The Heart of Man*

There is a second dimension that I believe also serves as a motive to restrict reality to either the self, or the material world. This dimension has to do more with humanity's inner psychological motives behind his beliefs. I think that restricting or reducing knowledge to either the self or the cosmos gives humanity an inner feeling of security, freedom, and control, and that often leads to an avoidance of reality and truth. Aldous Huxley once said,

"I had motives for not wanting the world to have meaning; consequently assumed it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption. The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem in pure metaphysics; he is also concerned to prove there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to do... For myself, as no doubt for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation. The liberation we desired was simultaneously liberation from a certain political and economic system and liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom."<sup>22</sup>

I'm not sure whether many atheists would be as willing to admit something like Huxley did, but whether or not they would, I believe that an honest look into the heart of humanity is important in understanding the trustworthiness of his its judgments. It can be convenient to assume the mind is this sort of unbiased computer that simply processes data logically. This would make our conclusions much more reliable and trustworthy. But what if there is something flawed at the root of our reasoning?

Plato had several analogies that shed an interesting light on this subject. The first is the story of Gyges' ring. The story is very similar to Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings",

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<sup>22</sup> Huxley, Aldous, "Confessions of a Professed Atheist", (Report: Perspective on the News, Vol. 3, June, 1966), 19.



where Gyges discovers a ring that possessed the power to turn him invisible. The question Plato asks is, how would humanity's actions be affected without any outside accountability? His answer is that when man is given power to be unjust, he will. Justice in man is simply the lack of power to do as we please. Plato writes:

And this we may truly affirm to be a great proof that a man is just, not willingly or because he thinks that justice is any good to him individually, but of necessity, for wherever any one thinks that he can safely be unjust, there he is unjust. For all men believe in their hearts that injustice is far more profitable to the individual than justice, and he who argues as I have been supposing, will say that they are right.<sup>23</sup>

The name Plato finally gives to this condition in men's hearts is 'veritable dishonesty.' I am reminded of Jesus' response in Jerusalem in where it says, "But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in Man."<sup>24</sup>

But Plato tells us that there is more than dishonesty in humanity's hearts, but also a preference for familiarity versus truth. The analogy he used for this was a cave in which men were chained and forced to stare at a wall upon which shadows were cast from a puppet show that was taking place behind them. To these prisoners, the shadows were the real world. In the story, one of them is freed and allowed to exit the cave where he at first experiences a tremendous amount of pain from the brightness of the sun.

Plato says:

And suppose once more, that he is reluctantly dragged up a steep and rugged ascent, and held fast until he is forced into the presence of the sun himself, is he not likely to be pained and irritated? When he approaches the light his eyes will be dazzled, and he will not be able to see anything at all of what are now called realities.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Plato, *Collected Dialogues*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 629.

<sup>24</sup> John 2:23-25

<sup>25</sup> Plato, 748.

When the prisoner's eyes finally adjust to the light, what he experiences is reality in a far truer sense. His own conclusion was that these were the true forms of reality and that what we so often take to be the real thing are mere reflections of the forms. He also concluded that given the choice to accept the shadows as real, or to face the brilliance of the light, that men would most often choose the shadows.

Once again, the book of John tells us something similar. He states:

There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.<sup>26</sup>

Scripture tells us that there is a third dimension to reality, a spiritual one, and not only does it exist, it is from it that we exist and that through it alone are we able to know reality at all.

### ***Spiritual Reality***

I don't mean to say that the spiritual realm is a literal "outside" realm where spiritual beings look in on us like stars observing from the sky. But I do think that when we ask the question, "what is reality?" the answer is defined by this third realm of reality. It is the light by which we see. It is the world beyond the fishbowl. It is the realm of the eternal, the immaterial, and the divine. C. S. Lewis described it as reality itself. He says, "But Heaven is not a state of mind. Heaven is reality itself. All that is fully real is Heavenly. For all that can be shaken will be shaken and only the unshakable remains."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> John 1:9-11

<sup>27</sup> Lewis, C. S., *The Great Divorce*, (New York: Touchstone), 68.

Man lives in a truly awkward place, searching for reality through fallible means, forming beliefs inductively and asking questions that lead to more and more questions.

## CHAPTER 5

### BRIDGING FOUNDATIONALISM AND COHERENTISM

#### **My Introduction to the Emergent Church**

One of the first books I read as a personal introduction to the Emergent Church movement was *Postmodern Youth Ministry*, by Tony Jones. I thoroughly enjoyed and resonated with his book. I loved his perspective on tradition, salvation, on community, and on evangelism. I couldn't agree more wholeheartedly on his shift in emphasis from entertainment and personality to mission, authenticity, and depth. This was a great book for me and left me feeling affirmed and challenged in my own philosophy of ministry.

It is also written in a true spirit of humility and openness. The very format allows for criticism from others within his community. As Jones examines the tensions felt between modern and postmodern culture and theology, he himself admits a need for caution. He says, "In the middle is a road of levelheaded wisdom: being aware of culture and its changing emphases without blindly embracing these characteristics."<sup>28</sup>

In this chapter, I will be examining the epistemological suggestions made by Jones and others in the Emergent Church movement as well as those that have influenced their thinking, and contrasting them with the epistemology of modern evangelicalism. I hope it can be done in a similarly humble and levelheaded manner. I will begin by examining the concerns with foundationalism and give an evaluation of their outworking

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<sup>28</sup> Tony Jones, *Postmodern Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 38.

in the theology of the church today. I will then look at the postmodern epistemological suggestions and their potential implications to metaphysics, theology, and practical ministry. Lastly I will make some suggestions for what I believe to be a more levelheaded and wise approach to epistemology for the emerging church.

I want to acknowledge ahead of time that the nature of this sort of philosophical writing can be difficult and feel a bit obtuse. My hope is to present the philosophy here in a way that will possess academic integrity, and yet have a level of accessibility for the average reader. However, I will also do my best to repackage these elements within ministry and church life that will better flesh out the theoretical concepts being illustrated here.

### **The Influence of Foundationalism**

Almost every book I have read on the subject of postmodernity, Tony Jones' included, begins with a critique of the foundationalism of Rene' Descartes and its implications on the church today. The critique, in summary, goes something like this... Descartes' quest was for an indubitable, or undoubtable, foundation for knowledge, one that was not only unquestionable, but universally accepted and recognized. His desire was to bring an end to the war and bloodshed being committed by the church upon the church over religious quarreling. His picture of foundationalism came to him when viewing a house being torn down. Similarly, he thought that our own beliefs must be dismantled through doubt until we reach the bottom, the certain and indubitable foundation. Upon this foundation could then be constructed, through deductive reasoning, an unshakeable structure of knowledge and belief. Descartes believed that he had solved

this riddle when he realized that through doubt, he was always confronted with the reality that there was someone doing the doubting. This became his unquestionable foundation and he has become renowned for his phrase, “I think, therefore I am.” Descartes’ quest did not bring about the universal peace he had hoped for, and his quest for certainty was carried on by others throughout the enlightenment period and has in many ways self-destructed in the last century as humanity’s absolutist views have repeatedly caused calamity after calamity, from Stalin to Hitler, without living up to their promise of uniting mankind through the use of reason and logic.

This failure of strong foundationalism to live up to its promises is based on some significant problems with the criterion required of it for properly grounded basic beliefs. One of these critiques, by Alvin Plantinga, refers to the self-destructive requirement towards the criterion itself. He writes:

If only beliefs that are self-evident or incorrigible or evident to the senses are properly basic, then it behooves us to ask about the epistemic status of this belief itself: that only beliefs that are self-evident or incorrigible or evident to the senses are properly basic. Is this belief itself self-evident or incorrigible or evident to the senses? No. Is it logically rooted in basic beliefs that meet these conditions? Again, the answer seems to be no. Strong foundationalism’s acceptance of the criteria for proper basicity thus runs afoul of its own standards.<sup>29</sup>

As Martin Jay puts it, “Descartes’ precarious reconciliation of reason and the senses-his belief that a mechanical understanding of essential reality could ultimately be reconciled with the everyday encounter with its appearances-came undone.”<sup>30</sup>

Yet the church has remained staunchly committed to the modernist agenda.

Nancey Murphy has pointed out that the two most common theological positions in the

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<sup>29</sup> Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Faith and Rationality*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Eerdmans, 1982), 60.

<sup>30</sup> Jay, Martin, *Songs of Experience*, (Berkley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2005) 41.

church today, that of liberalism and fundamentalism, are really just two versions of the same epistemology, just with different indubitable foundations.<sup>31</sup> For the liberal Christians, their faith is built upon the foundation of spiritual experience, while the fundamentalists base their beliefs entirely upon the foundation of scripture. Whether through the liberalist foundation of spiritual experience or the fundamentalist foundation of Scripture, the church today still commonly makes its evangelistic appeal by referring to a self-evident truth supporting their claim to absolute certainty of belief.

This has led to an evangelistic approach that is based almost entirely upon logic and deductive reasoning. Apologetics, as a result, is often lessons in correct responses to outside questions and a sort of fill in the blanks approach to teaching and witnessing. No wonder the world has a view of Christians being narrow-minded and indifferent. We often come across as having *arrived* and all that is left for us is to offer our knowledge to the misinformed in the hopes that they too might see the light.

I can personally relate. I have experienced the inadequacy of this approach first hand through the many opportunities I had in college to share and evangelize using tracts and surveys during my time with Campus Crusade at Cal Poly. Though I was never kicked out of the group, like Tony Jones was, I left the organization with deeper concerns than when I went in. I had spent hours memorizing and polishing my evangelism spiel until I had it down word for word. Yet time and again I found myself asking others the question, “which circle do you want to represent your life?” while feeling in my heart I was grossly oversimplifying something far more complicated and significant.

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<sup>31</sup> Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*, (Harrisburg, PN, Trinity Press International, 1996), 11.

This is not to say that this method of evangelism was entirely ineffective. I had the opportunity to share the gospel with many that did pray a prayer of salvation and experienced true change and freedom as a result. But that didn't change the fact that less and less people were responding to the method, and time and again I was having difficulty moving beyond the first page..."just as there are physical laws that govern the universe, so there are spiritual laws."

### **The Web of Belief**

When I read Brian McLaren's *New Kind of Christian*, he gave an analogy of the spider web as a new epistemological model for our faith, an alternative to the modern, foundationalist approach. This model does not require one indubitable foundation, but instead allows for a number of anchor points, each of which is admittedly defeasible, held together by points of coherent connections. I have since seen this analogy more fully drawn out by Nancey Murphy in several of her books and articles. It is a great picture of how our minds work and how beliefs can change and grow. It is a model that I've used from time to time in talks with students, one that I've seen make a significant impact on their own faiths.

What I love about the web model is that it presents such a holistic picture of belief and faith. It allows for so much more than just my personal readings and interpretations of the Bible, but also my perceptions and experiences of reality, my rational and logical thought, the influence of my personal community, and the input of other authorities in my life such as parents, mentors, etc.

Tony Jones points out that we no longer need to prove our web is divine, but instead it can be compared to other people's webs based on which web provides more coherence, equilibrium, an ability to repair itself, and a better matching with human experience. Given these criteria, we can assumedly evaluate which web of beliefs is stronger without the need to devalue the entirety of another's web.

But just because we have given up the quest for an indubitable foundation does not free us from the task of evaluating our anchors. What then qualifies as a properly sufficient anchor for our beliefs? The model of the web assumes some sort of objective connection to reality. You don't see spider's webs floating freely in space. They are anchored to branches and leaves, to the side of my house, and especially to the hard to reach places near the ceiling. While certainly each of these points of the web provides some stability, not all of them provide equal stability. Certain anchors are surely stronger than others. How do our anchors connect to reality?

According to the philosopher, W.V. Quine, the edges of the web *are* experience, each of which is interpreted through coherence with the rest of one's beliefs. It is only from within this man-made structure that we can make inferences about the world. The problem is that the criterion for coherence is also part of the web of beliefs; it is an internal belief. Therefore, it is possible for there to be a multitude of contradicting, yet coherent belief structures.

Jones says, "Better that we begin to speak of our Christian tradition, our theology, and our faith as the best option among many-the most adequate for human life and existence, the most intellectually coherent, the most true to real life experience, the most



resilient.”<sup>32</sup> But how can one evaluate between webs when, according to his view, there does not exist an objective, God’s eye view from which man can judge? How can we use a word such as “better” without assuming an external sort of measurement, one which we admittedly have no direct access to?

I think that the most common response would be to say that the best web is the one that corresponds most closely with reality. We can look at the world and make judgments based on how closely our views correspond to some outside, objective reality, but I’m not sure this option is left open to a traditional coherentist, like Quine. The idea of a correspondence theory of truth was one that Ludwig Wittgenstein and Quine were adamantly opposed to. Wittgenstein says, “The mistake we are liable to make could be expressed thus: We are looking for the use of a sign, but we look for it as though it were an object co-existing with the sign. (One of the reasons for this mistake is again that we are looking for a ‘thing corresponding to a substantive.’)”<sup>33</sup> This means that the point of connection is not some extra-mental object. Quine says, “The stimulation of his sensory receptors is all the evidence anybody has had to go on, ultimately, in arriving at his picture of the world.”<sup>34</sup>

What does this mean? It means that our concepts of reality are limited to our interpretations of sense data. Our thoughts are of concepts that the mind has constructed. How do these concepts compare to an objective concrete reality? According to

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<sup>32</sup> Jones, 143.

<sup>33</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), 5.

<sup>34</sup> W.V.O. Quine, “Epistemology Naturalized” in *Empirical Knowledge: Readings in Contemporary Epistemology* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996).

Wittgenstein, they don't. Instead, these concepts simply are reality. But what are these concepts *of* or *about*?

In his article, "A Crucial Error in Epistemology," Dallas Willard raises the potential problem of seeing a mirage of an oasis in the desert. The concept one sees is of something that is moist and filled with wild beasts. But Willard points out that this false perception has none of these features. My concept itself is not moist, only the object of my thought is. As it turns out, this object doesn't even exist. It is a false perception. Willard says, "What one is cognizing turns out, on the type of view in question, to be something very different from what one thought he was thinking of."<sup>35</sup> According to Willard, our beliefs do not change or modify this objective reality, but instead match up or fail to match up with it.

But if we reject this view of correspondence, how then do we make sense of this data? Wittgenstein tells us that it is through the language of our community. Wittgenstein's views on language are necessary in order to prevent the web from becoming a floating bubble. It is community that provides meaning through the use of language.

In the midst of one's community of common language users one is given a context in which words and sentences can be understood and reality can be verified and validated. We can even make universal claims such as "Christianity is the most true religion" assuming that this statement is rational within our language game. But to say that this statement is somehow objectively true, apart from my own beliefs becomes meaningless. Our world and our language, according to this view, are inseparable.

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<sup>35</sup> Dallas Willard, *A Crucial Error in Epistemology*, published in *MIND: a Quarterly Review of Psychology and Philosophy*, Vol. LXXVI, N.S., No. 304, October. 1967, 514.

Jones says, “Modern thinkers said the experience comes first and the language of faith is an attempt to express that experience. The postmodern counters that the language is first and our religious experiences are categorized by the words and phrases of our faith community.”<sup>36</sup> But if language precedes experience, then it would seem that the role of language is one of making reality versus matching to reality.

Kevin Vanhoozer gave a warning in his section of *Postmodern Theology*. He said, “the besetting temptation of the postmodern condition is not pride, I submit, but sloth... The question is whether certain forms of postmodernity act as corrosives to the conditions for the possibility of commitment, poisoning the will by depriving it of anything in which to believe ultimately.”<sup>37</sup>

Dallas Willard refers to this as a “Midas touch epistemology.” “The object which comes to stand before the mind is in some essential way made by a ‘grasping’ of something other than it (sensa?)—and then the object before the mind too is ‘grasped’.”<sup>38</sup>

This view of reality has some definite appeal, especially when contrasted with a strong, Cartesian foundationalism. It would account for the role that language plays in helping us interpret and understand the world we live in. (An art history class provides us with language by which the viewing of a piece of art can take on incredibly more meaning). It also would explain how human beings have a tendency to hear and see the world selectively according to their own desires, fears, and preferences.

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<sup>36</sup> Jones, 153.

<sup>37</sup> Vanhoozer, Kevin J., *Postmodern Theology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 23-24.

<sup>38</sup> Dallas Willard, *How Concepts Relate the Mind to its Objects: The ‘Gods Eye View’ Vindicated*, 1.

But the reduction of reality to interpreted experience, in the end, forces us into an inescapable agnosticism. We become, in Wittgenstein's words, a fly in a bottle. We are isolated from the world, trapped behind a wall of our own experience. The world, on the other side of the bottle, is one that we can never 'get at.' For all intents and purposes, it is one we can never know and at best must remain silent about.

But what does this do to our ministry? We can welcome others into the community of our groups and help them to learn our language. We can expose them to a variety of holistic experiences and traditions in order to provide them a context from which to learn Christianity as a second first-language. But in the end, we can never say the word 'better', only 'better for me.' What do we mean by better? According to Wittgenstein it is simply its usefulness to us personally.

I wonder how successful such an approach would be in today's consumerist, narcissistic culture, especially when so much of our Christian language has become polluted by past misuse and hypocrisy. How useful is a faith that asks its followers to deny immediate pleasure and persevere under hardship? How useful is a faith that requires its followers to die to themselves?

My fear is that, if we aren't careful, we will be presenting our churches with an optional and unappealing view of reality where one's knowledge of God is reduced down to mere experiences of God.

### **Moderate Foundationalism**

A third option that I feel has remained largely overlooked by the Christian postmodern writers I have read seeks to find a balance between Cartesian

Foundationalism and Postmodern Coherence. It is a view that brings together the strengths of each of these views in a way that is not only philosophically convincing, but also theologically satisfying. The view has been termed 'moderate foundationalism' and is largely credited to the philosopher Roderick Chisholm.

Moderate foundationalism has a great many similarities to Quine's web of belief, and incorporates a great deal of coherence in its structure. According to Robert Audi it is a view of knowledge which:

- (1) takes the justification of foundational beliefs to be at least typically defeasible;
- (2) is not deductivist, that is, does not demand that principles governing the inferential transmission of knowledge or justification be deductive; and (3) allows a significant role for coherence by requiring, not that inferentially justified beliefs derive all their justification from foundational ones, but only that they derive enough of it from the latter so that they would remain justified if any other justification they have were eliminated.<sup>39</sup>

What does this mean? First, that the beliefs that are held to be basic or foundational beliefs aren't immune to questions. They do not possess the indubitability that Descartes sought after. An anchor point of the web can be proven false.

Second, the non-foundational beliefs of the web can indeed be the result simply of coherence alone and aren't necessarily experientially testable, nor deductively derived from experience. They can be derived inferentially, prior to experience. However, they must cohere with our experientially justified anchor points in such a way that if one of these anchors proved to be false, there would still remain enough justification to warrant the belief. In other words, any belief that is held prior to experience, needs not to base its entire strength of warrant upon a single anchor point, but must also derive additional coherent support from other points of the web of belief.

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<sup>39</sup> Robert Audi, *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1998), 205.

The key distinction that is made between this view and that of Quine is the specific role of coherence in the web. “What moderate foundationalism denies is coherence as a basic source of justification. Coherence by itself is not sufficient for justification.”<sup>40</sup>

This is a significant difference between moderate foundationalism and the view recommended by Murphy, McLaren, and Jones. Jones says that reasoning is a two-way street instead of a one-way. What Jones is suggesting is that in our web of beliefs, we have certain views that have no grounding in experience that affect the way we view the world. Nancey Murphy refers to these as “hard-core beliefs.” Where then do these hard-core beliefs come from if not experience? According to postmodern evangelicals, it would seem to be from whatever particular language game we have learned.

In foundationalism, the reasoning is always moving from the foundation up since the foundation is the indubitable, unquestionable basis of the entire system. Postmodernism has shown, however, that the experience affects doctrine and doctrine affects experience, and the web scheme reflects this.”<sup>41</sup>

But this two-way street of belief forming is essentially saying that nonexperiential beliefs derived solely from coherence can be properly basic and can even influence the way we see the world. While we can certainly see indications of this happening, in hallucinations for example, we need to be careful about crediting these beliefs as knowledge. False beliefs cannot be knowledge. A two-way street such as Murphy and Jones are recommending seems preventative to ever having any sort of confidence that the way we believe is truly reflective of the way things actually are in reality.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>41</sup> Jones, 139.

Moderate foundationalism similarly requires coherence with experience in order for justification of belief to take place. However, it is only this sort of justification that provides grounds for knowledge either directly or indirectly by tracing the beliefs back to their grounding. This grounding must be distinguished from the strong foundationalism of Descartes. As Audi says, “A belief direct and foundational at one time may be indirect and non-foundational at another; it may gain or lose justification; it may have any kind of content and some foundational beliefs may be false or unjustified or both.”<sup>42</sup>

This moderate foundationalist view of knowledge requires us to remain more open-minded to what constitutes knowledge. With that comes a necessary humility in our beliefs. But it also allows us to avoid the pitfalls of strong foundationalism’s absolutist approach. “It avoids dogmatism, in the sense of an attitude of self-assured certainty, especially concerning claims that are neither self-evident nor obvious.”<sup>43</sup>

What this means for the moderate foundationalist is a lack of certainty must be admitted to in what constitutes knowledge. We can have justified belief without 100% assurance. Instead, it might be helpful to think of belief along the lines of a scale from 0-100. At the half way point, 50, would be the point of true indecision. At 51, we believe, but barely, with minimal warrant to our beliefs. We grow in our knowledge as we progress up the scale, growing more and more in our justification and with it our confidence.

Esther Meek has made the suggestion that instead of the term certainty, we would instead replace it with the term confidence. She says:

When we speak of epistemic success, truth claims that engage the real, the notion of an exhaustive certainty or justification is not only impossible, it is unwanted. It

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<sup>42</sup> Audi, 207.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

doesn't do justice to the rich fabric of human experience, rooted as it is in our bodies and connecting us to a three-dimensional world, and all of it a motion through time oriented toward the future. I suggest that a better term is confidence. Confidence accredits the effort to know in light not only of the reasons we are able to articulate but also of the multitudinous features that we can't put into words, from our felt body sense to our sense of future horizons.<sup>44</sup>

In our step away from strong foundationalism, we have given up the project of arriving at a 100 in certainty. However, we have not limited ourselves from a 99 in confidence.

I am reminded of the father of the demon-possessed boy exclaiming to Jesus, "I do believe. Help my unbelief." This lack of certainty does not render the humanity's beliefs inadequate to qualify as knowledge, but instead allows the opportunity for a strengthening of belief and knowledge through experience. It allows for a synthesis between reason, experience and authority. These three become self-checking and allow for us to test our beliefs against reality through inference and probability.<sup>45</sup>

Some might say that it is here that the true rubber meets the road. How does this synthesizing take place in a way that our beliefs are not only subjectively strengthened, but objectively, in such a way that their correspondence to the world can be trusted? I believe that it is at this point where the epistemology of one philosopher in particular has provided for me both clarity and insight for how modern and postmodern epistemologies overlap. The philosopher is Michael Polanyi, and I strongly believe that his tacit dimension of knowledge preserves both the need and necessity of the subjective elements of knowledge, but also its qualification as objective knowledge that is moving toward a post-critical epistemology.

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<sup>44</sup> Esther Meek, *Longing to Know*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2003), 137.

<sup>45</sup> Dallas Willard, from an as yet unreleased lecture on knowledge.



## CHAPTER 6

### PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE

#### **The Tacit Dimension**

We know more than we can tell. These words of Michael Polanyi's demonstrate an interesting problem for modern and postmodern philosophers alike. How can we claim to possess knowledge of something that we cannot articulate? If knowledge is inescapably incommunicable at some level, how can we deem it a justifiable belief? How can we know something that we cannot explain?

Polanyi gives several examples of how we possess and use knowledge that we are unaware of. In the first example, a test subject that receives a shock as he is viewing a series of arbitrary symbols will begin to anticipate and react to certain ones associated with the shock without even being aware that he is doing so or what symbols are causing his anticipation. The second example is a person recognizing a particular physiognomy on the face of someone else and from it being able to determine his mood. Or similarly, one is able to recognize a stranger without being able to describe what exactly triggered the recognition. The third example he uses is that of a hammer hitting a nail. We think that we are feeling the head of the hammer strike the nail, when in reality we are feeling the butt of the hammer hitting the palm of our hand. Each of these examples illustrates a component of knowledge he refers to as the tacit dimension.

The first example, that of the electric shock, reveals two distinct terms of tacit knowing that end up representing the very structure of knowledge Polanyi is presenting. The two terms he describes as distal and proximal.<sup>46</sup> The distal term is what we are

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<sup>46</sup> See illustration in Appendix A.

focally aware of. It is the feeling of the shock, the recognition of another's mood, or the sensation of hitting the head of the nail. The proximal is the term we are only subsidiarily aware of. It is the symbol by which the test subject was anticipating the shock, and this shock became the term that was specifiable to him. He was unaware of the fact that certain symbols were triggering the apprehension of the shock. These symbols are what he was tacitly attending from. As Polanyi says, "This is how we come to know these particulars, without becoming able to identify them. Such is the functional relation between the two terms of tacit knowing: we know the first term only by relying on our awareness of it for attending to the second."<sup>47</sup>

But we do possess a form of knowledge of the proximal term, even if we are unaware of it. This is demonstrated by our ability to use this information to form additional beliefs that cohere to reality. In this case, we are anticipating a shock symbol without it entering our focal awareness, but we are anticipating correctly. The symbol truly is the trigger for the shock.

The example of the physiognomy reveals a further understanding of how these two terms interact. When trying to give a facial description of a perpetrator, we will probably be unable to produce anything definitive for police investigators. However, if the police allow us to go through a flip chart of different eyes, and noses, and mouths, we can usually end up constructing a fairly recognizable image. What this reveals is an ability to draw from ones tacit awareness of what particulars we are attending from. These particulars are in and compose the very appearance of what we are attending to.

I propose that this is posing a significant way forward to the dilemma faced by Wittgenstein and his fly in the bottle. Wittgenstein concluded his *Tractatus Logico*

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<sup>47</sup> Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, (Gloucester, MA:Peter Smith, 1983),10.

Philosophicus with the well known quote, “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.” But Polanyi, is demonstrating a way out of the bottle, by demonstrating the mechanism by which we are able to articulate what we were formerly unable to, and to demonstrate a form of use and knowledge for that of which we cannot speak. He is demonstrating a way forward, that is imperative to bridge the gap between the subjective and objective.

In the case of interpreting emotion through one’s facial expressions, as we better understand the proximal features of the physiognomy, they provide more than just a subtle connection between a smile and feelings of happiness. These features begin to provide meaning. Polanyi says, “To identify a physiognomy would then amount to relying on our awareness of its features for attending to their joint meaning. This may sound far-fetched, because the meaning of the features is observed at the same spot where the features are situated, and hence it is difficult to separate mentally the features from their meaning. Yet, the fact remains that the two are distinct, since we may know a physiognomy without being able to specify its particulars.”<sup>48</sup>

### **Preserving an Objective Reality**

What this means is that, according to Polanyi, we must not reduce reality down to mere language. The significance here is that this is what many in the emergent church movement have accepted as reality. They are right in attributing much of the significance of humanity’s intellect to his ability to use language, and that this language becomes an essential component to our understanding of the world around us. But the mistake comes when they make world and language inseparable. Certainly they are strongly interrelated,

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 12.

but they cannot be reduced down to a single term. The particulars from which we are drawing meaning, are not the meaning itself, nor are they constructed by the meaning. It is not a two way street.

This meaning can be taken further in the example of the hammer, or similarly that of a blind humanity's cane. A transformation takes place in the interpreting of the feelings happening in the palm of one's hand to the extension of the probe hitting things outside. As this takes place, the tool itself becomes an extension of us. Polanyi then points to the human body as an example of a similar transformation and our very sense perception as having a similar two-term structure involving a tacit dimension. He says, "Our own body is the only thing in the world which we normally never experience as an object, but experience always in terms of the world to which we are attending from our body. It is by making this intelligent use of our body that we feel it to be our body, and not a thing outside."<sup>49</sup>

Polanyi refers to our inhabiting of our bodies as indwelling, and this becomes an important metaphor for how we come to understand knowledge in general. He says, "In this sense we can say that when we make a thing function as the proximal term of tacit knowing, we incorporate it in our body-or extend our body to include it-so that we come to dwell in it."<sup>50</sup> In the same way, moral knowledge is interiorized as we identify ourselves with the teachings, and use it in practice as the proximal term. As we attend from the distal to the proximal, we become aware of the particulars. As these particulars become interiorized, we observe them not in themselves, but instead in their bearing on

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

the comprehensive entity they constitute. Polanyi says, “It brings home to us that it is not by looking at things, but by dwelling in them, that we understand their joint meaning.”<sup>51</sup>

Polanyi clarifies this distinction by describing what takes place when a word is repeated over and over until it loses its meaning, or a pianist focuses too closely on what his fingers are doing and becomes temporarily immobilized. Something happens in this immobilization that becomes very important for growth. By reintegrating these particulars back into a holistic framework, we are learning a skill that can be improved upon. “The detailing of particulars, which by itself would destroy meaning, serves as a guide to their subsequent integration and thus establishes a more secure and more accurate meaning of them.” It is through this process that we gain a mastery of knowledge and true artistry emerges.

As a modest guitar player, this example reminds me of when I was learning to form chords with my left hand or eventually learning to finger pick with my right. Initially this was a painfully awkward stage, where I would consciously have to place each finger on the desired fret or string. But slowly and laboriously I began to gain in my familiarity with these patterns and movements. It was similar in my learning to finger pick. The patterns felt incredibly unnatural and overly complex. But eventually, what Polanyi calls indwelling would begin to take place. My fingers would begin to move without any conscious thought being given to it. Eventually I could even sing, or hold a conversation without stopping the pattern. But every once in a while I would think about what I was doing, and immediately my fingers would lock up. It is in this moment of having to reintegrate our knowledge of particulars back into our holistic framework that our abilities move towards mastery.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 18.

Dallas Willard describes knowledge as an interactive relationship. I think this is at the heart of what Polanyi is describing using the terms indwelling or interiorizing. It requires action, experience, intimacy and imitation. This artistry is not something that can be simply explained and passed down through words. Instead it requires apprenticeship. It requires more than hearing a lecture, but also showing our work. Willard has mentioned that he asks his students at the end of a test whether or not they believe what they wrote. It is not enough to recite or mimic. True knowledge requires our whole selves.

### **Preserving the Personal and Subjective**

This personal component of knowledge is not only beneficial, but is essential in order for us to possess true knowledge of our beliefs. A purely objective knowledge is not just unattainable, but is undesirable, because one would be incapable of discovery and growth. To demonstrate the problem of purely objective knowledge, Polanyi goes back to Plato's contradiction in the Meno, and humanity's inability to discover a solution of a problem.

The paradox is that either we know what we are looking for, and therefore there is no problem, or we don't and cannot expect to find anything. How can we know there is a problem to fix without already knowing what it is that will fix it? How can we put together the pieces of a puzzle without knowing what the completed puzzle will look like. Either we already know the answer, or we cannot hope to know the answer when we find

it. “The kind of tacit knowledge that solves the paradox of the Meno consists in the intimation of something hidden, which we may yet discover.”<sup>52</sup>

The tacit dimension yields a foreknowledge of the undiscovered. It is here that Polanyi’s background as a scientist is vital. How does science make forward progress? How are major advancements made? How are paradigms reformed?

### **Bridging the Subjective and Objective**

“The act of knowing includes an appraisal; and this personal coefficient, which shapes all factual knowledge, bridges in doing so the disjunction between subjectivity and objectivity. It implies the claim that man can transcend his own subjectivity by striving passionately to fulfill his personal obligations to universal standards.”<sup>53</sup>

Polanyi uses Einstein’s discovery of his theory of relativity as a picture of where the origins of his brilliance lay. Scientists have wanted to credit this discovery to Einstein’s reflections on the Michelson-Morley experiment of 1887, when, in reality, this experiment fails to give the proper results required by the theory of relativity. Polanyi believes that this experiment has been enshrined as Einstein’s breakthrough moment, because it supports a more mechanistic view of science, one that happens to be strongly confronted by the problem mentioned in the Meno. But Polanyi believed that not only was this mechanistic philosophy of science incorrect, but it failed to describe how Einstein had truly arrived at his theory.

Polanyi was able to write to Einstein and enquire about this particular question and Einstein confirmed to Polanyi that his intuitions were right. The theory of relativity

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Polanyi, *Personal knowledge*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 17.

had begun for Einstein with a thought experiment conducted in his imagination, when, at the age of 16, he imagined what it would be like to ride alongside a light beam.<sup>54</sup>

Einstein spoke often of the significance of individuality, of independence, and most importantly, of imagination. He even believed that his slower development as a child had given him the advantage of contemplating space and time at a later point in life when his cognitive faculties were more developed. Everything was worth questioning and every discovery presented endless possibilities of further discoveries.

I believe that it is this spirit that Polanyi is arguing for and seeking to preserve from modernistic conceptions of science. True discovery is not entirely objective, nor should it be. In *Personal Knowledge*, Polanyi states:

We cannot truly account for our acceptance of such theories without endorsing our acknowledgment of a beauty that exhilarates and a profundity that entrances us. Yet the prevailing conception of science, based on the disjunction of subjectivity and objectivity, seeks—and must seek at all costs—to eliminate from science such passionate, personal, human appraisals of theories, or at least to minimize their function to that of a negligible by-play.<sup>55</sup>

Polanyi is fighting for the power of the subjective in unlocking reality. He is not arguing for the power to create and define reality, but instead to point to subjectivity as an essential component to seeing beyond what is already known. Polanyi writes:

We feel sure of this, because in contemplating the discovery we are looking at it not only in itself but, more significantly, as a clue to a reality of which it is a manifestation. The pursuit of discovery is conducted from the start in these terms; all the time we are guided by sensing the presence of a hidden reality toward which our clues are pointing; and the discovery which terminates and satisfies this pursuit is still sustained by the same vision. It claims to have made contact with

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<sup>54</sup> Walter Isaacson, *Einstein: His life and universe*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007), 3.

<sup>55</sup> Michael Polanyi, *Personal knowledge*, 16.



reality: a reality which, being real, may yet reveal itself to future eyes in an indefinite range of unexpected manifestations.<sup>56</sup>

I believe that this personal contact with reality is what sets Polanyi's epistemology apart from his contemporaries and what provides the necessary middle ground between modern and postmodern conceptions of truth and knowledge. It acknowledges its limitations and yet is firmly committed to a correspondent reality that one can know, that we can grow closer and closer to understanding. Not only is the personal aspect a reality of our knowing, but also it becomes an essential aspect of one possessing justification and affirmation of the truth of one's beliefs. He says:

It appears, then, that to know that a statement is true is to know more than we can tell and that hence, when a discovery solves a problem, it is itself fraught with further intimations of an indeterminate range, and that furthermore, when we accept the discovery as true, we commit ourselves to a belief in all these as yet undisclosed, perhaps as yet unthinkable, consequences.<sup>57</sup>

Polanyi believes that our tacit knowledge and our inarticulate faculties are what set apart humanity's superior intellect from animals. It is more than our ability to use language. It is our ability to act skillfully in our acquisition of knowledge. He says:

If, as it would seem, the meaning of our utterances is determined to an important extent by a skillful act of our own-the act of knowing-then the acceptance of any of our own utterances as true involves our approval of our own skill. To affirm anything implies, then, to this extent an appraisal of our own art of knowing, and the establishment of truth becomes decisively dependent on a set of personal criteria of our own which cannot be formally defined...The ideal of an impersonally detached truth would have to be reinterpreted, to allow for the inherently personal character of the act by which truth is declared.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, 24.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

## A Way Forward

This personal act of knowing, as opposed to an entirely objective act, is what allows for discovery. It is what allows for justification. But there is clearly an element of faith in this process. It is inescapable, I believe, but is not an existential leap of irrationality. Instead, it is a rational belief in rationality itself. It is a belief that has been forming since birth and one that we often accept tacitly, but not blindly. It is self-authenticating. It is a belief in the efficacious power of tacit knowing to reveal reality.

I am reminded of St. Augustine's words when he stated, "If you have not understood, said I, believe. For understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore do not seek to understand in order to believe, but believe that you may understand; since, 'except ye believe, you shall not understand.'"<sup>59</sup>

I am also reminded of what C.S. Lewis argued for in his description of what he referred to in the *Abolition of Man* as the Tao. Lewis uses this terminology to refer to the vast evidence for a natural law that all civilizations and societies have recognized over the years. What I found so enlightening about Lewis' viewpoint is that the rationality of the Tao can only be understood from within, or in submission to the Tao. This is not an admission to solipsism, but instead gets at the inseparability of knowledge and reality. To deny the Tao is to deny rationality. There is no way to rationally defeat rationality. Lewis says, "If it is rejected, all value is rejected. If any value is retained, it is retained. The effort to refute it and raise a new system of value in its place is self-contradictory."<sup>60</sup>

In an article entitled, "Religion without Dogma", Lewis writes:

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<sup>59</sup> Tractate 29 (John 7:14-18)

<sup>60</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 55.

The validity of rational thought, accepted in an utterly non-naturalistic, transcendental (if you will, supernatural) sense is the necessary presuppositions of all other theorizing. There is simply no sense in beginning with a view of the universe and trying to fit the claims of thought on at a later stage. By thinking at all we have claimed that our thoughts are more than mere natural events. All other propositions must be fitted in as best they can round that primary claim.<sup>61</sup>

The validity of rational thought is, for Lewis, the starting point. To question this is to fall into iterant skepticism. To step outside of this, is to render oneself incapable of articulation. But from within, one is not just capable of knowing truth, but is also able to grow in ones depth of knowledge. It is from within that we can make advancements in knowledge. Lewis says, “I am simply arguing that if we are to have values at all we must accept the ultimate platitudes of Practical Reason as having absolute validity: that any attempt, having become skeptical about these, to reintroduce value lower down on some supposedly more ‘realistic’ basis, is doomed.”

But accepting these platitudes gives us more than justification for our existing beliefs. It provides us, tacitly, with foreknowledge of undiscovered truths.

### **An Epistemology of Hope**

I believe that Polanyi has provided an epistemological way forward for the church today. The tacit dimension is not merely a powerful description of what is actually taking place in the minds of men, but also is reflective of the commitments to truth and reality that Christianity requires. It honestly acknowledges the limitations involved with human reason and perception, yet provides the mechanism by which we can grow and renovate the mind and grow in the art of knowing, ever looking forward with a messianic

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<sup>61</sup> C.S. Lewis, “Religion Without Dogma”, *God in the Dock*, (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 132.

hopefulness to the discovering of greater truth and the understanding of the depths of knowledge.

As ministers, our goal should be to provide our churches not only with the experiences and language of our faith and tradition, but also the tools and skills necessary for evaluating the strength of beliefs. Doctrines of the faith could be tested against scientific evidence and the historical record. Mystical experiences could be compared with the authority of Scripture. Logic and reason could allow us the ability to differentiate between other webs of faith and belief. With this epistemology, we would be allowed to make inferential and inductive claims towards the reliability of our beliefs without forcing us to assume an all or nothing stance. Cumulative cases could be made for God's existence based on probability that would not require the belittling of another's view, but instead a commonsensical appeal to reality.

Last year I had the opportunity of attending the Electronic Entertainment Expo at the L.A. Convention Center. Walking into the various auditoriums was like stepping into an ocean of visual stimulation. The rooms were filled with thousands of screens projecting incredibly realistic images of battle scenes, basketball games, and street fights while spectators and participants immersed themselves in the virtual worlds being created for them. Almost every major video game company was revealing a new massive multiplayer game involving a virtual world they had created which could be inhabited by players for a low monthly fee. I was blown away.

Our world is becoming more and more hyper-real. Entertainment and reality television are providing us with concepts of life, marriage, and relationships defined by shows like 'Newlyweds' and 'The Bachelor' that reveal more about our obsessive

fantasies than any sort of actuality or veracity with life. Virtual life has this sort of intoxicating appeal that is presenting people with more and more options for escape and avoidance. As one advertiser had printed on an enormous banner at the convention, “Because we understand that saving your village from the dragon is more important than your job.”

As ministers, I believe that we will fail to reach our congregations if we are presenting Christianity as a useful language to interpret the world. If that were the case, I cannot see how we could compete with the other options out there. If our beliefs are not reflective of truth and reality, we become just another idea or concept vying for their attention. Why serve others when we can serve ourselves? Why tell the truth when it is more advantageous to lie? Why not simply avoid conflict when the process of resolving it will result in further pain and discomfort?

Leonard Sweet says:

This shift in which our subtexts are larger than our master texts leaves us not with a new or improved approach to life, but only a temporary and ultimately fatalistic preamble to death. It’s a choice we make to turn our back on glimmers of transcendence on earth in favor of a temporary pleasure-feast enjoyed prior to dying. As a result, we have entered an era in which death—or dying by inches—is somehow more appealing than life and transcendence. We have rejected the metanarrative that helps give form and substance to life (and even to life beyond this life) in order to embrace the small narratives of false idols, consumerism, and self-indulgence that promise short-term bliss and lead ultimately to death.<sup>62</sup>

Christianity provides an answer to these questions that is more than just coherent, but objectively real. I have seen church members respond so powerfully to apologetic answers to the faith, evidence for Christ’s resurrection, and scientific support for Biblical accounts of God’s creation. I believe that having the right epistemology allows for this

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<sup>62</sup> Sweet, Leonard, *The Three Hardest Words in the World to Get Right*, (Colorado Springs, Waterbrook Press, 2006), 14.

without falling into the dogmatism and absolutism of modernism. I believe moderate foundationalism requires humility and openness as our view of foundations moves from indefeasibility to defeasibility. Evidence becomes reason for justification of beliefs, not proofs by which to disprove another's.

I realize that moderate foundationalism is not immune from iterate skeptical attacks. It is definitely not a perfect epistemology. But as Christians in ministry, I believe that the commitment to objectivity with humility is essential if we are to provide compelling answers for the hope within us with gentleness and respect. I believe that it is this epistemology that the church today needs to seek to apply and to defend. As the world is rapidly shifting towards a postmodern mindset, our people are desperately seeking an anchor amidst the tossing waves of doubt and pluralism. The message of the gospel is the message of hope to this world. It is this hope that provides an anchor for our souls.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE INCOMPREHENSIBILITY OF GOD

The incomprehensibility of the infinite has forever baffled the minds of men. Man looks up at the stars and is struck by his own minuteness. He stares at the pyramids in Egypt or the Coliseum in Rome and is reminded how brief and insignificant his life truly is within the span of history. Yet, this does not prevent him from at least attempting to grasp meaning and purpose for his finite existence within the context of infinity.

It is no surprise that we find it difficult to comprehend God. He is, by His very nature, unfathomable. Paul reflects in Romans, “Oh, the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!”<sup>63</sup> To attempt to comprehend eternity is to grapple with a mere facet of God’s character, and yet we find even this too much to grasp. It is no surprise that Solomon, in Proverbs, urges us to “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.”<sup>64</sup> Why? Because our understanding pales in comparison with God’s and His perspective is infinitely greater than our own.

But this does not mean that we are to throw out our own understanding. We instead are to recognize the limitations of our cognitive abilities. We are to hold our understanding loosely, recognizing that it is not a substitute for the understanding of God, but, at the same time, the very means that we possess for understanding anything at all. The question is how we navigate this road of discerning God’s will and differentiating it

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<sup>63</sup> Romans 11:33

<sup>64</sup> Proverbs 3:5

from our own, especially in light of humanity's tendency for dishonesty coupled with the natural limitations we face as finite human beings. We find ourselves facing one of the greatest and most difficult paradox's in historical Christianity, the paradox of faith.

While there are many different responses to this question, I think that there are classic examples by two different philosophers that I wish to look at that represent the different sides of the paradox, and that give a clearer picture of the dilemma we face: Søren Kierkegaard and Blaise Pascal.

### **Faith as a Wager**

Blaise Pascal writes:

If there is a God, he is infinitely beyond our comprehension, since being indivisible and without limits, he bears no relation to us. We are therefore incapable of knowing either what he is or whether he is. That being so, who would dare to attempt an answer to the question? Certainly not we, who bear no relation to him.<sup>65</sup>

Yet Pascal does attempt an answer, one that he is renowned for. Pascal says that, when faced with a choice requiring faith-such as the existence of God, we must commit ourselves one way or the other, like in the flipping of a coin. He writes:

Since you must necessarily choose, your reason is no more affronted by the choosing one rather than the other. That is one point cleared up. But your happiness? Let us weigh up the gain and the loss involved in calling heads that God exists. Let us assess the two cases: if you win you win everything, if you lose you lose nothing. Do not hesitate then; wage that he does exist. 'That is wonderful.'<sup>66</sup>

Although there is an attractive sensibility in this decision, it does seem to leave something to be desired. In Hebrews it says, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped

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<sup>65</sup> Pascal, Blaise, *Pensees*, (London: Penguin Books), 122.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 123.



for, the conviction of things not seen.”<sup>67</sup> In verse 2 & 3 of the same chapter it is written, “For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” Could it be that there is a virtue at stake that takes one beyond mere wagering and into something for which one ought to be commended?

### **Faith as a Leap**

In order to examine the virtuosity of faith more deeply, let’s look at an example of one of the greatest tests of faith recorded in scripture, the story of Abraham and Isaac. Later, in Hebrews 11, we are given a list of examples of men and women whose faith has been justified through various acts, the story of Abraham being the foremost of them all in both greatness and perplexity. In verses 17-19 it says:

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, or whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.<sup>68</sup>

Here we see one of the greatest paradoxes in scripture. Abraham is asked to kill his promised heir, a child he has miraculously been given by God in his later years of life.

This test of faith is troubling, for the act of killing one’s son out of obedience to God is disturbing to say the least. It could even be argued that such a challenge would stand in contradiction to the heart and nature of God, especially a God that claims to be both loving and benevolent.

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<sup>67</sup> Hebrews 11:1-3

<sup>68</sup> Heb. 11:17-19

There is no doubt that this story moves beyond humanity's reasoning and into the depths of God's character. Abraham knew that God *could* bring his child back from the dead, but not that he *would*. Because of the depth of feelings that must have been associated with this test, I have difficulty believing that Abraham's obedient response was simply his wager, especially since it would seem that the preferable choice, and even the more rational, would be to refrain from child sacrifice. Surely disobedience would be at least justifiable and in the end, his child's life would be spared. This was Kant's perspective. Kant felt that Abraham failed the moral test God gave him. But Abraham was commended for his decision, which seems to indicate that there was a right answer to the test-in this case obedience to God-and that it was the more difficult of the two options.

Søren Kierkegaard, in his book *Fear and Trembling*, sees Abraham as a man of high esteem because of his act of obedience. Kierkegaard saw faith as the highest human act and Abraham as a great hero and the first historical figure of faith. He is in awe of such a virtuous act and doubts whether he would ever have such faith. He states, "...Abraham I cannot understand, in a certain sense there is nothing I can learn from him but astonishment."<sup>69</sup>

According to Kierkegaard, we operate on three levels in regard to life and morality. First there is the aesthetic level where we act intuitively on an individual level. Second is the ethical level where we respond rationally through means such as philosophy, science, and even theology. Lastly is the level of faith, a return to the individual level, yet not to the purely intuitive. Rather it is an infinite leap of faith into the

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<sup>69</sup> Bretall, Robert A., *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 118.

absurd and unintelligible will of God. To judge Abraham's actions as insane is to reduce them back down to the level of rationality. Abraham makes this leap out of our finite world and into a realm in which one ceases to be in the universal and rational and instead operates as an individual in the absurd. This is what Kierkegaard felt it meant to be qualified as a knight of faith. In his words:

The knight will have power to concentrate the whole content of life and the whole significance of reality into one single wish. If a man lacks this concentration, this intensity, if his soul from the beginning is dispersed in the multifarious, he never comes to the point of making the movement; he will deal shrewdly in life like the capitalists who invest their money in all sorts of securities, so as to gain on the one what they lost on the other-in short, he is not a knight at all.<sup>70</sup>

I wonder how much of this position is written in response to the practical, almost disassociated version of the faith of Pascal's wagering. Kierkegaard wants to preserve the nobility of Abraham's response by giving him the title of a knight. The difficulty is in pinpointing where exactly the virtue of faith lies. It does not seem to be in the practicality of humanity's rational, self-centered wagering; yet it seems awkward to say that a leap into the infinite without any sort of understanding or justification is hardly to be praised. What good is a risk for risks sake? We refer to this sort of action as foolhardy, not virtuous. As Luci Shaw said, "Risk should not reflect a celebration of foolishness but a freedom from fear."<sup>71</sup>

### **Glimpses of the Infinite**

Although I hardly feel comfortable adding to the work of these two philosophers, I think that it is possible to find a middle ground to their positions, one that does not

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., pg. 122.

<sup>71</sup> Shaw, Luci, *The Crime of Living Cautiously*, (Downer's Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press), 20.

reduce faith down to a statistical gamble, nor force us to leap into the irrationality of the existentialist. I believe that finding the answer to this dilemma requires our understanding mystical perceptions of God as true glimpses into the infinite.

If man existed in a closed system, one in which God had no interaction with Him, Pacal's reasoning would seem appropriate. But if, by way of mystical perception, one was to find evidence of God penetrating into this finite world, he would have to at least consider the possibility of the existence of God. The stronger the mystical perception, the greater the clarity one would have of the existence of the infinite as well as an understanding of the depth and character of God's nature.

Biblically, these mystical perceptions have taken a variety of forms. God appeared to his people as a cloud during the day and a fire at night as they were led through the desert. He spoke to Elijah in a gentle whisper of the wind, to Moses through a burning bush, and to Balaam through a donkey. He wrestled with Jacob and appeared in the fiery furnace with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He appeared as a blinding light to Paul on the road to Damascus.

These types of experiences defy the natural order of the world and serve as demonstrations of the power and nature of God. As C. S. Lewis writes:

It is always shocking to meet life where we thought we were alone. 'Look out!' we cry, 'it's alive'. And therefore this is the very point at which so many draw back-I would have done so myself if I could-and proceed no further with Christianity. An 'impersonal God'-well and good. A subjective God of beauty, truth and goodness, inside our own heads-better still. A formless life-force surging through us, a vast power which we can tap-best of all. But God Himself, alive, pulling at the other end of the cord, perhaps approaching at an infinite speed, the hunter, king, husband-that is quite another.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Lewis, C. S., *Miracles*, (London: Touchstone), 150.

Kierkegaard implies that a leap of faith is done with fear and trembling, resigning oneself to the infinite without the security of rationality. As frightening as this may be, it would appear to pale in comparison to a true divine encounter. Rather than it being a departure from reason, it is the realization that we are a part of something far bigger than our own individual needs or desires.

The significance of these mystical intrusions is that they bring the infinite within the context of the finite, to penetrate inside the fishbowl, and into the snow globe. Although the rationality of God surpasses that of man, it does not render it useless. Without humanity's rationale, he would lack any sort of background system from which to make an evaluation. What purpose would there be in the test? God is interested in Abraham's heart.

I think that it is important to note that with the situations of greatest testing come some of the strongest experiences of mystical perception. Job, Moses, Elijah, Abraham, Paul; all of these men had radical experiences of God along with the various trials and transformations they underwent. In 1 Corinthians, Paul writes, "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."<sup>73</sup>

The correlation between a way of escape and the measure of mystical perceptions experienced, I believe, is more than coincidental. Perhaps mystical perceptions provide additional rationale without overriding the element of uncertainty necessary to qualify it as a true test of faith. According to William Alston, "even the mystical perceptions do not make a wholly independent contribution, it still makes its weight felt by providing a kind

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<sup>73</sup> 1 Cor. 10:13

of justification not otherwise available, and, often by providing it for a kind of belief that is susceptible of no other sort of justification.”<sup>74</sup>

It is by these mystical perceptions that we are able to bridge the logical or heuristic gaps that Polanyi discusses in his book, *Personal Knowledge*. Polanyi states:

the act of knowing includes an appraisal; and this personal coefficient, which shapes all factual knowledge, bridges in doing so the disjunction between subjectivity and objectivity. It implies the claim that man can transcend his own subjectivity by striving passionately to fulfill his personal obligations to universal standards.<sup>75</sup>

This unique contribution is one that man is incapable of discovering on his own. God is not a cell to be examined under a microscope, nor an animal to be viewed in its habitat. He is not a person we can sit down and converse with. Though His effects can be observed, the only way we can truly know or understand God is through His revelation to man. Every mystical perception we experience is a unique offering from God to us.

### **The Courage to Believe**

It seems to me that the virtue of faith lies specifically in one’s courage and bravery to follow God without the security of knowing all the reasons why. As Esther Meek states, “As a human, I believe, you long to know. Do not surrender the passion. And as you pursue understanding, have the courage to admit both that your conclusions might be wrong, and that you also believe you are right.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Alston, William P., *Perceiving God*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press), 302.

<sup>75</sup> Polanyi, Michael, *Personal Knowledge*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 17.

<sup>76</sup> Meek, Esther, *Longing to Know*, (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press), 72.

God pursues us out of a desire for both our genuine love and our personal growth. He does not wish to overpower us with His presence, but instead woos us to Him. He leads us gently through life's trials, withholding Himself in order to develop our perseverance and strength.

Lewis provides an insightful dialogue on God's withholding of His presence in *The Screwtape Letters*. In the words of the uncle demon Screwtape to his nephew Wormwood:

We can drag our patients along by continual tempting, because we design them only for the table, and the more their will is interfered with the better. He cannot 'tempt' to virtue as we do to vice. He wants them to learn to walk and must therefore take away His hand; and if only the will to walk is really there He is pleased even with their stumbles. Do not be deceived, Wormwood. Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our Enemy's will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys.<sup>77</sup>

I believe this passage encapsulates well the mystery of why God has allowed uncertainty to exist in our beliefs of Him. It is only in uncertainty that faith is possible. It is only in faith where our commitments to God are made clear. These commitments are significant to God as both acts of worship and demonstrations of the depth of relationship that we have with Him. Mystical perceptions of God make this possible. They are necessary for us to walk in obedience to God. Though our tendency is to lose sight of God in our own sinfulness and dishonesty, God actively pursues us in relationship. Yet His revelations of Himself are for but a moment. God doesn't want followers who respond to Him like wowed spectators, nor does He want us to love Him out of a hidden, selfish agenda. Instead He wants a friendship with us where obedience flows from a heart and mind actively abiding in Him. As Jesus says in John, "No longer do I call you

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<sup>77</sup> Lewis, C. S., *The Screwtape Letters*, (London: Touchstone), 47.

servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made know to you.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> John 15:15



## CHAPTER 8

### PAUL'S EPISTEMOLOGY FOR CORINTH

#### **How Proper Knowledge Leads to Maturity**

The purpose behind this dissertation is to not only provide an epistemology that would lead us beyond the pitfalls of modern foundationalism, but would also provide the tools that would lead us forward in our understanding and knowledge of a God that is beyond our naturalistic conceptions. I believe that Paul, in the book of 1 Corinthians does this and more. He provides a challenge for the people to grow into a mature understanding of God that yields proper fruit. This knowledge does more than provide an understanding of true reality. This knowledge changes the knower. It creates in us the depth of understanding that allows us to see outside our natural confines and to begin to glimpse those things of true glory.

Paul makes it clear that it is knowledge of God that matters. For this reason, humanity's wisdom can present a stumbling block to a true perception of reality. Paul's epistemology begins with humility. Without this, we are incapable of understanding even the most basic of truths of our own condition, let alone our need for salvation. Paul says, "For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."<sup>79</sup>

#### ***Humility of Mind***

Perceiving truth requires humility of mind. Without it we become hardened. We become self-obsessed. We become our own standard and measure of justice, of health, of

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<sup>79</sup> 1 Cor. 1:18

beauty. We become solipsistic. But if, in humility, we acknowledge a wisdom superior to our own, we place ourselves in a position to receive. Humility and openness go hand in hand. We place ourselves in a position to receive from the very Spirit of God. Paul says:

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one.<sup>80</sup>

Our humility should lead us to a place of sobriety about our beliefs and understanding. Our humility should not act as an encouragement towards agnosticism. In fact, it should have the very opposite effect. The importance to know and understand the things that are of true value should only be underscored by our humility. There is a goal, a telos, in all of this, and an accompanying task. We are laying a foundation that will serve as the basis for the very quality of our life's work.

### ***The Foundation is Christ***

I think it is important to reflect on the fact that this foundation is not in some biblical truth or fact, but instead is Christ Himself.

According to the grace of God which was given to me like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.<sup>81</sup>

I love the matter-of-factness of this statement. The foundation is already laid. The question of building has to do with a relationship with a personal God. It is I-Thou. It possesses all and more of the complexities and depth of our earthly relationships. It is

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<sup>80</sup> 1 Cor. 2:12-15

<sup>81</sup> 1 Cor. 3:10-11

neither a doctrinal statement nor a description; the foundation is a person, and true knowledge is relational intimacy with Jesus. The Spirit leads us further and further in our understanding of the depths of God, who He is and who He desires us to be.

### **Encouraged to Question**

1 Corinthians is also Paul's response to a number of questions from a vibrant, and yet immature body of believers. While many of the questions being asked reveal an improper and even arrogant spirit, Paul in no way chastises their questioning. Instead he encourages the church to "examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good."<sup>82</sup> Paul welcomes the questions, as long as they are directed toward the good, toward truth.

Paul's response to the questions is incredibly helpful in our attempt to understand an epistemology that leads towards depth of belief. Some have described his approach as "yes, but..."<sup>83</sup> As he takes each individual question, he begins by affirming the truth and relevancy of what it is that they believe, but also challenges them to examine the bigger issues and the kingdom purposes.

I like this picture of understanding as an expanding of knowledge, like the rings of a tree. It requires maturity on the part of the knower. It requires an added level of discernment. If we are pursuing truth with humility, the perspective comes with the territory.

For example, the church in Corinth was being influenced by their newfound freedom and had embraced the idea that all things were lawful for them. Paul says yes,

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<sup>82</sup> 1 Thes. 5:21

<sup>83</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *The NIV Application Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 160.

but...not all things are profitable. I will not be mastered by anything. The message of the gospel is liberation from the law, it is true, however we have a higher standard that requires even more of us, not less. To misunderstand this point is to fall back into immorality, gluttony, injustice, and boasting. Paul is saying that our liberation requires an increase in wisdom and discernment, or quite simply, for maturity.

In regard to meat sacrificed to idols, Paul says, “we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.”<sup>84</sup> How ought we to know? The fruit of proper knowledge takes into account those around us. It is not about rights and freedom alone, but about the conscience and sensitivities of others. This sensitivity should not just be apart of our decision, but should in fact be the deciding factor.

In many ways, Paul is adding an additional component to our understanding of knowledge. In addition to being fundamentally relational, it must also bear proper fruit. Individual rights and decisions cannot remain in isolation, but must be understood in light of the whole or the bigger picture. What are the results of my beliefs? How do they effect my relationships? How do they effect who I am and who I am becoming?

### **Unity and Diversity in the Body**

Paul then proceeds to discuss the analogy of the church as Christ’s body.

Important to this analogy are two interdependent values...that of unity and diversity.

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<sup>84</sup> 1 Cor. 8:1-2

True unity requires diversity, and true diversity requires unity. Unity without diversity is homogeneity. Diversity without unity is chaos. Paul insists on the interdependence of the body and the necessity of each part. We cannot live without each other. We are interdependent by design.

But this is hardly an accurate description of how churches are today. I think that this is less the result of prejudice, and more of an indication of the enormous amount of work required for us to live together with those that differ in belief, values, and style. We avoid the cognitive dissonance created by the realization that good people have very different expressions of faith. So we segregate on Sundays based on comfort issues as trivial as the raising of hands during worship or the inclusion of an electric guitar.

I think Paul's understanding goes far beyond these simple stylistic preferences, but our tendency to avoid each other and seek familiarity in such superficial issues prevents us from ever getting close to those issues of more theological diversity. But this diversity is necessary for there to be proper functioning within the body.

### ***Tongues and Prophecy***

Take for instance the area of tongues and prophecy. Paul addresses this area specifically in the church in Corinth and cautions the unrestrained practice of what he validates as a necessary and highly valuable gift. In fact, his desire is that all would prophecy. But prophecy must be done in such a way that the interdependence of the body is felt, the God's purposes and character are fulfilled, and the fruit that is born bears the proper character.

The interdependence comes as a result of the need for affirmation and translation.

Paul says:

If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret; but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in church; and let him speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first must keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.<sup>85</sup>

I love the picture that is captured in these words. If we could only learn to function in such a way! This proper functioning of the body in correctly determining prophetic utterances is extremely important for us to grasp. It is a part of what it means for us to grow into maturity as a body and as individuals. There are two parts to this that must come together. Paul says:

For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. What is the outcome then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also. Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the “Amen” at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying?<sup>86</sup>

### ***Singing with the Spirit and the Mind***

The idea of spirit and mind being required for the fullness of meaning to be revealed in prophecy demonstrates both God’s specific purposes, and his design for the necessity of interdependence amongst different members of the body. Certainly there are those that favor more of a spirit approach vs. the mind and vice versa. These terms are fairly representative of two distinct camps within evangelicalism, that of charismatics and fundamentalists. As stated before, Nancey Murphy has shared that both of these positions

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<sup>85</sup> 1 Cor. 14:27-33

<sup>86</sup> 1 Cor. 14:13-16

are built on a similar foundationalist epistemology, with either religious experience for charismatics, or scripture for fundamentalists as an unquestionable foundation. But because of such a fundamental and impenetrable position, both camps have no road forward in reconciling to one another.

What is so revealing about Paul's words in 1 Corinthians, is that he is demonstrating how desperately these two positions need each other. But without a new epistemology, we lack the tools to even value the other, let alone to actually learn from and be dependent on those of opposing view. The spirit needs the mind. Without it, who can interpret or give the amen? The mind needs the spirit. Without it, we become incapable of hearing God's specific messages and bugle calls.

But it is not about simply putting up with an opposing side. As we grow in our ability to listen to those of different giftings, we begin to grow in our understanding of what we are not specifically gifted in ourselves. We begin to pray in both spirit and mind.

### ***The Greatest Fruit is Love***

But more important even than our own spiritual development is the fruit of what is being demonstrated in our unity in diversity. The fruit of this is love, and Paul makes it extremely clear that without this, we have completely missed the point. "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal." Rarely do we discuss love in regard to knowledge, but Paul is clear that without it our words become meaningless. He goes on to say, "If I have the gift of

prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.”<sup>87</sup>

### **The World’s Perception of Christians**

I want to argue that the fruit our existing epistemology bears very little resemblance to what Paul is recommending. Our knowledge leads us towards divisions and strife. It is often contentious, defensive, and filled with arrogance. In fact, it is felt so strongly that this is most often what the world perceives. In his recent book, *God is not Great*, Christopher Hitchens states, “God did not create man in his own image. Evidently, it was the other way about, which is the painless explanation for the profusion of gods and religions, and the fratricide both between and among faiths, that we see all about us and that has so retarded the development of civilization.”<sup>88</sup>

I am also reminded of a statement by Douglas Adams quoted by atheist, Richard Dawkins that says:

Religion...has certain ideas at the heart of it which we call sacred or holy or whatever. What it means is, ‘Here is an idea or a notion that you’re not allowed to say anything bad about; you’re just not. Why not? – because you’re not!’ Yet when you look at it rationally there is no reason why those ideas shouldn’t be as open to debate as any other, except that we have agreed somehow between us that they shouldn’t be.<sup>89</sup>

Christians are perceived as not only closed-minded, but as blindly adhering to an unquestioned set of beliefs without willingness to be called into question. Unfortunately, this description is not all that far off from where the church finds itself today. When we disagree, we bifurcate. One has merely to read the online reviews of current Christian

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<sup>87</sup> 1 Cor. 13:1-2

<sup>88</sup> Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great*, (London: Atlantic Books, 2007), 8.

<sup>89</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 21.



authors to see either lavish praise or scathing reviews on just about every topic. We are either for it, or against it. We are intolerant with positions within our traditions even.

But this closed-minded epistemology is not biblical. It is not derivative from the words of scripture. It is a system of belief that is birthed from the things of the old man. It comes from fear and insecurity and our desire to possess. But true knowledge is marked by love. It is:

patient and kind, not jealous, does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all thing, believes all things, hopes all things endures all things.<sup>90</sup>

The pursuit of knowledge that is done with Christ as the telos, reveals Him in the very pursuit and creates in us a heart that is capable of greater understanding.

### **Paul's Unwavering Commitment to Truth**

This does not mean we aren't strongly, even essentially committed to certain truths. As Paul comes to the conclusion of his chapter, he addresses a false belief the church has latched onto regarding the legitimacy of bodily resurrection. Paul makes it adamantly clear that without the truth of the resurrection of the dead, Christianity itself falls apart. He says, "But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain."<sup>91</sup>

But this is not an unquestionable truth to Paul. He doesn't say that because it is an essential it is therefore to be taken as dogma. Instead, he demonstrates the reliability of this truth by several strong and reasonable appeals. He mentions how the resurrection of

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<sup>90</sup> 1 Cor. 13:4-7

<sup>91</sup> 1 Cor. 15:13-14

Jesus was foretold by the scriptures. He reminds them of the vast number of eyewitness accounts of Jesus having raised from the dead, many of whom were still alive at the time of Paul's writing the letter to Corinth. He then mentions his own personal interaction with the risen Christ.

### ***Multiple Sources of Knowledge***

But Paul doesn't limit his argument to simply the authority of scripture and the authority of others experience. He clarifies that without a bodily resurrection being possible, the very hope of Christianity becomes fallacious and their testimony falsified. He says, "If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied."<sup>92</sup>

But Paul is not merely reliant on reason and authority alone for his argument. He looks to the very creation itself as a demonstration of the possibility of a new and supernatural bodily form being created. He uses the example of a seed as a picture of the necessity of death and the possibility of new life. He refers to the types of flesh that exist in beasts, in birds, in fish, etc., in argument of the rationality of a new type of flesh being logically possible. Last, he points to the planets themselves as an indication of similar bodies with different manifestations of glory.

### ***Truth Gains its Full Meaning in Light of Context***

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<sup>92</sup> 1 Cor. 15:19

Paul finishes off by revealing to them the truth of the resurrection in light of their history, stemming all the way back to the first Adam. Christ becomes the new Adam, a life-giving spirit that is not from the earth, but instead from heaven. It is this knowledge that gives us hope. We will not perish. Death will not triumph. All will be put right. This is not some mantra that we repeat over and over to convince ourselves. It is a mystery that we are intended to have knowledge of and to let shape our lives. What is the fruit of such knowledge? Paul tells us, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.

Paul has written this book to his friends and fellow believers. It is a book that deals with very cultural issues being faced by the church in Corinth. And yet the example that is given here is one that we as a church need to desperately be reminded of. We need to learn to think and function as the body, and to do so in a way that leads to the fullness and diversity Paul is describing, not the homogeneity of our current churches. I believe that the possibility of this lies in the maturity of believers in their understanding of true knowledge that embraces both spirit and mind. Only this type of diversity demonstrates the charity that Paul describes in chapter 13. It is this charity and love that the world is both longing for and seeking after. It is this type of love and maturity that we need to move into if we are to become who God designed us to be individually and as a community. It is this type of love and maturity that is necessary for the body to do the work of the kingdom that is required of us.

## CHAPTER 9

### AN EPISTEMOLOGY FOR THE JOURNEY

#### **Importance of Narrative**

In her book *Storycatcher*, Christina Baldwin, writes on the power and significance of story and its ability to help us both as teller and catcher to make connections. Baldwin gives a list of descriptives of a story catcher, that they are “intrigued by human experience; inquisitive about meaning, insight, and learning; more curious than judgmental; more in love with questions than answers; emphatic without over identification; [and] able to hold personal boundaries in interpersonal space.”<sup>93</sup> Her list goes on, but as I read those words I began to see a huge similarity between her description of a good story catcher, and the type of character required to live a modest epistemology.

A significant part of my thought process has turned to the more relational aspect of knowledge, and connecting this with Martin Buber’s description of the Thou vs. the It. I think that this is what Baldwin is addressing from a different angle. Stories reveal the person behind the story. They bring us into connection with the otherness of the teller. In a similar way, true knowledge must do the same thing. It must take us beyond propositional knowledge and descriptions to the reality of God Himself.

It is my hope, in this chapter, to use story as more than allegory, but as the method of fleshing out the realities of a modest epistemology. Hopefully, the stories can make connections that will give insight into the person behind the paper and allow for a more

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<sup>93</sup> Baldwin, Christina, *Storycatcher* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2005), 29.

interpersonal exploration of these concepts for the reader and deeper personal connections to be made.

### ***Why Climb?***

“He made my feet like the feet of a deer and set me secure on the heights.”<sup>94</sup>

Sir Edmund Hillary, the first man to climb Mt. Everest, once said, "It is not the mountain we conquer, it is ourselves. If you can overcome your fear, you are frequently able to extend yourself far beyond what you normally regard as your ability." There is no question that the majority of my own experiences and challenges in climbing have been more mental than physical. Yes, it is exhausting and tiring work getting your body and equipment up the face of a mountain, but it is quite another thing to maintain the discipline of mind required to function with a clear head at such high altitudes and with so much exposure beneath you.

I have never climbed anything close to Everest, but I have been up on a few routes that took over a day to climb. There are certainly plenty of moments during that time when you ask yourself, “Why in the world am I doing this?” Those moments sitting on a tiny ledge, shivering, your hands bleeding, and eating cold ravioli out of a can, make you want to get back down to the ground as quickly as possible. But when you’re up that high, the fact is that there is no easy way down.

Most climbers begin a long climb by fixing ropes on the first few pitches so that they can spend at least one more night sleeping on flat ground. They spend the day on the face, climbing a few hundred feet up, but descend down the fixed ropes at the end of the day, and then jug back up the lines the next morning. But that only works for the very

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<sup>94</sup> Psalm 18:33

start of the route. At some point, you have to leave the lifeline behind and resign yourself to finishing what you've started. At that point, you're committed, whether you like it or not. Leaving behind the fixed lines is a bit like letting go of the side of the pool and moving into the deeper waters. You're stepping into the wild.

Another famous quote attributed to Hillary is that if you have to ask why men climb mountains, there is no answer. I think he's on to something there. Serious mountain climbers are driven by a vision and passion that cannot be explained. They risk all for the sake of the summit and there are very few who don't bear significant scars as the fruit of that passion. Almost as common as missing toes and fingers from frostbite is the loss of friends and loved ones from unforeseen tragedies or misfortunate mistakes. Without the vision of the summit, they would never be able to endure what they had been through or sacrificed to reach the top.

This idea of vision and commitment has parallels to many aspects of life, but here I would like to explore their connection with knowledge of God. As I shared in the previous chapter, I believe that growing in true knowledge requires courage in facing the uncertainties of our beliefs head on. It requires a posture of humility that many find threatening. It offers a view of knowledge that might comparatively appear a cheap substitute to the strong certainty we've grown up with and become accustomed to.

As I've discussed these ideas with other Christians and recommended a shift in their epistemology, the question I get over and over is "Why?" "Why would I choose a more difficult path?"

It is a fair question. I have built a case previously that a release of indubitable certainty is required if we are to honestly face reality. But the fact is, most people in the

church today are functioning quite well from their perspective with a very modern understanding of knowledge. Why would someone choose such apparently risky ground when the comfort and safety of the familiar appears to be so immediately available?

### *Losing Sight of the Story*

“Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”<sup>95</sup>

It is a common misconception amongst Christians that in order to live as Christ told us we must simply choose to believe in certain propositions. The fact is our actions are a reflection of what we already believe. We spend so much of our time anguishing over what we know we should be doing, or bored by the lack of purpose and meaningfulness of life, when we should be out there living and experiencing the life of the kingdom that God has made available.

To live the life of the kingdom is, I believe, the calling of every Christian. It is this calling that beckons us to climb. But without a vision for the summit, the choice becomes too costly. Kingdom living is left for the ‘go getters’ that want to receive extra credit. It is for the ones that want an extra pearl in their crown. We assume that the normal calling of Christ is much more comfortable. It doesn’t involve us going overseas, or sacrificing too much for the sake of the poor. It doesn’t require us making significant changes to our lives or altering our personal goals. It is a way of resolving the otherwise uncontrollability of life after death.

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<sup>95</sup> Philippians 3:13 & 14

But this is like saying the purpose of marriage is helping us avoid loneliness. Marriage is not a way of meeting our needs or controlling our environment. A healthy marriage is anything but controlling. It is about a connection with another person. It is about a relationship. If we make the mistake of reducing our spouse to information and propositions about that person, and then assess our relationship based on how we are affected by that information, we have reduced that person to an object, or what Martin Buber refers to as an It vs. a Thou.

Buber says:

The life of a human being does not exist merely in the sphere of goal-directed verbs. It does not consist merely of activities that have something for their object. I perceive something. I feel something. I imagine something. I want something. I sense something. I think something. The life of a human being does not consist merely of all this and its like.  
All this and its like is the basis of the realm of It.  
But the realm of You has another basis.<sup>96</sup>

One of the consequences of the fall, I believe, is humanity's natural tendency to reduce the Thou to the It. We do this in order to control our environments, to establish our own significance and to lord over our kingdom. But the fact is, in so doing, we become less and less capable of love. Our relationships become idolatrous or self-serving. Our religion becomes a system of self-gratification, achievement, and sin management.

But this is missing the point almost entirely. The difference between the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25 is based on whether or not they knew Christ and this knowledge was determined by their actions. The sheep that belong to Jesus are the ones that recognize His voice and obey his commands.

Jesus cautioned those that would follow him to weigh the cost. It was not a journey for the faint hearted. It would require sacrifice, and demand more than we are

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<sup>96</sup> Buber, Martin, *I and Thou* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 54.



When they finally did stand up and move into position for the rappel, they wouldn't be able to physically lean onto the rope. I can still vividly picture the awkward limbo people would do with their body, contorting their spine in order to follow my direction to lean back, and yet avoid the dreaded fear of trusting in something they had no personal knowledge of, only their limited trust in me as their instructor.

In those situations, it became apparent that their confidence was entirely dependent on me. My presence, assurance, and calmness is what would get people to do something they believed themselves incapable of doing. They didn't need to hear how reliable the equipment was (although plenty asked), they needed eye contact, reassuring words, and the promise that it was all going to be okay.

Seeing the face of the person who finally placed their weight entirely on the rope is truly a delight. That is true knowledge. It is a relationship. It requires action, commitment, and faith. When it is experienced in such a way, it brings with it a flood of joy, a thrill of success, and assurance that things are the way they seem. No one who climbed the wall and descended for the first time left unchanged.

I think that there are plenty of moments in life where we are being beckoned by God to follow Him to places we would never rationally choose on our own. With it comes the offer of life. Not just life, but life to the full. But the cost is always the same; our feeling of control.

I remember when my wife and I made the decision to come to the church where I currently serve as assistant pastor. The job that I had always dreamt of, the college pastor position at Bel Air Presbyterian, actually became available as I was stepping down from my previous position. The timing seemed miraculous. I remember thinking about how

perfect this was and certainly evidence of God's hand. It fit my goals, it fit my passions, and it wasn't a bad career choice either.

When my current pastor called and asked if I was interested in applying to be the part time jr. high and high school youth pastor at a little church in Laguna Beach, I confidently told him "no." He began explaining a little about the church and pretty soon my curiosity was peaked. So much of what I heard him describe was exactly what God had been stirring in my own heart in recent years. I told him I would come and check it out.

When we came to the church we fell in love with it, with the people, the worship, the community. I was faced with the realization of spiritual needs I was unaware of in my own heart as I was ministered to that Sunday. Most of all, I felt God is saying, "This is where I want you." I mentioned this to Patty, my wife, and she said, "I was hoping you were going to say that."

After that day, I remember standing at such a crossroads. My friends thought I was nuts. I was turning my back on such an incredible opportunity. In fact, many thought I was simply a coward, and that I was running back to familiar ground. But honestly this was not the case. I was scared to death that I was missing the one opportunity I had always hoped for. I was laying a dream on the altar, and a part of myself as well, and accepting the fact that, from this point on, I was no longer clear on where God was taking me. I felt the choice was mine and that God would have blessed either direction, but I also felt him hoping I chose the humbler of the two options. The decision to come to this church in Laguna Beach was basically me discarding my map and saying to God, "I'm in."

I hope that this story does not trivialize the significance of God's involvement and direction in our lives. Certainly God is concerned about a great deal more than what job I take. I realize that there are much more substantial concerns, instances of saints truly suffering, and my own inability to fully grasp the realities of what it means to take up my own cross. The illustration is a simple one, and yet the implications of it are profound.

In the Psalms it is written:

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained; what is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than God, and You crown him with glory and majesty!<sup>97</sup>

It is in moments like this that we see the reality of what N. T. Wright describes as the overlapping of heaven and earth. He says, "The Spirit is given to begin the work of making God's future real in the present."<sup>98</sup> And later he says, "Those in whom the Spirit comes to live are God's new Temple. They are, individually and corporately, places where heaven and earth meet."<sup>99</sup> What a powerful picture! To become a Christian is to be indwelt with the Spirit of God Himself, and this relationship becomes the connection between infinity and us.

Martin Buber states, "The meaning is therefore that when we recognize humanity's finitude we must at the same time recognize his participation in infinity, not as two juxtaposed qualities but as the twofold nature of the processes in which alone humanity's existence becomes recognizable. The finite has its effect on him and the infinite has its effect on him; he shares in finitude and he shares in infinity."<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Psalm 8:3 & 4

<sup>98</sup> Wright, N. T., *Simply Christian* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 124.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>100</sup> Buber, Martin, *Between Man and Man* (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), 144.

When we follow Christ; when we welcome him into our hearts, we must come to grips with the present of not just the infinite, but the truly otherness of God's spirit. We are indwelt with the Spirit of Christ. This is our confidence and our assurance. As the apostle Paul states:

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf...that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.<sup>101</sup>

This is truly a radical concept, and what I've mentioned elsewhere is what I believe potentially frees humanity from its isolation and subjective imprisonment. It is what allows humanity to understand itself and to explore the ideas of what it ought to be and what it legitimately can hope for. The indwelling of Christ makes it possible for humanity to know not only itself, but also the very mysteries of God.

This is what stands out most strongly to me in the book of Acts, the apostles' coming to grips with the reality of the indwelling of the Spirit of God in themselves. Until this point, their identity had been found in the laws which God had given them to set them apart; specifically circumcision and the eating restrictions of the Jewish people. As God begins to reveal the mystery of His chosen people becoming a conduit of His blessing to the world, one of the things that must change is the rigidity of the belief systems of the leadership.

I love the interaction between Peter and the rest of the church in Acts 11. Peter has just had a radical, life altering experience as he is confronted by the realization that his understanding and constructs of the kingdom of God are inadequate. The initial word comes in a vision that Peter has where God tells him to eat meat that was forbidden

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<sup>101</sup> Col. 2:1-2

according to Jewish law. Peter's response is classic. He tells God, "by no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean." But God tells him new information. He says, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy."

Peter is given a greater revelation of God's purposes, but his initial response is to drawback, to cling to what is known. Propositional knowledge is useful in determining the authenticity of God's voice, but it can too easily be mistaken for the voice itself. Peter is able to allow for the consideration of such a change, and his paradigm is stretched, his knowledge grows, and God's plan continues to emerge.

Peter realizes, after witnessing the legitimate conversion of Cornelius and the indwelling of the Spirit that he and his family receive, and says to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean."<sup>102</sup> In the end he makes the powerful statement to the church leaders in Jerusalem, "Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"<sup>103</sup>

But so often we do stand in His way. Clinging to the way things were when God is beckoning us further is disobedience.

### **The Assurance of Things Hoped For**

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<sup>102</sup> Acts 10:28

<sup>103</sup> Acts 11:17

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”<sup>104</sup>

What is it that would motivate someone to leave behind the security of the fixed lines of their knowledge and beliefs? It must be the conviction of the reality that the summit is attainable. What is the summit? I believe that it is the depths of God Himself.

1 Corinthians asks:

For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words, taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.<sup>105</sup>

The epistemology of the journey is one of spiritual discernment. It does require both the knowledge of scripture and the faculties of humanity’s intellect, but these become tools that enable us to hear and understand the voice of God’s spirit within us. In order to discern the spirit requires confidence and hope that things are as they appear. As Amos Yong stated, “The hypothesis that reality is what it is by virtue of having both concrete form and dynamic or relational vector leads to the conclusion that discerning the inner—spiritual—aspect of any thing requires focused attention on its concrete particularities. The inner is revealed in the outer. Discernment of spirits therefore requires careful and intensive engagement with the phenomenon in question as it is revealed in its concreteness.”<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Heb. 11:1

<sup>105</sup> 1 Cor. 2:11-13

<sup>106</sup> Yong, Amos, *Beyond the Impasse* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 151.

Discerning God's spirit requires the fullness of humanity's faculties. But it also requires the belief that truth is bigger than our understanding, and reality goes beyond the concrete phenomena that is immediately accessible to the senses. It demands that we engage in it in such a way that we are looking past the sensory perceptions and experiences to the Thou we are experiencing, God Himself.

This understanding of God requires us to lay aside our own striving for significance and step forward, naked of our own particulars and engage with God in both spirit and truth. It is the ultimate picture of intimacy and vulnerability. No wonder we draw back. But it is where God is leading us, and, by obedience, He promises we can get there.

In *The Great Divorce*, by C. S. Lewis, a spirit is visiting the entrance of heaven and observing the interactions between the ghosts, like himself, that are visiting and the spirits that reside there. There is one conversation in particular between an Episcopal priest who resides in hell, and a former friend who is now in heaven. In Lewis' story, hell is a place of both hope of morning and a field of indefinite progress, and yet hope in a morning that never dawns, and progress without any sort of end. Heaven, however, is reality itself.

The priest chides his friend for the narrowing of mind that happened to him at the end of his life and the stifling nature of final answers. He says to the spirit, "The free wind of inquiry must always continue to blow through the mind, must it not? 'prove all things' ... to travel hopefully is better than to arrive."

"If that were true, and known to be true, how could anyone travel hopefully? There would be nothing to hope for."

“But you must feel yourself that there is something stifling about the idea of finality? Stagnation, my dear boy, what is more soul-destroying than stagnation?”

“You think that, because hitherto you have experienced truth only with abstract intellect. I will bring you where you can taste it like honey and be embraced by it as by a bridegroom. Your thirst shall be quenched.”<sup>107</sup>

### **It's Got to be a Whole Lot Bigger**

In an article in Time magazine, leading atheist, Richard Dawkins, enters into a debate with Christian geneticist Francis Collins. Collins concludes his position by making the claim that many of the answers he finds in life to the most important questions come from a realm outside of science, from which Dawkins has closed himself off. Dawkins responds by saying, “If there is a God, it’s going to be a whole lot bigger and a whole lot more incomprehensible than anything that any theologian of any religion has ever proposed.”<sup>108</sup>

I agree. It is a dilemma we face as humans that much of what we believe is limited to what we can construct and imagine. When it comes to God, we are constantly battling against the idolatry of making him in our own image. What we come away with is an image of God, and a lot of our own baggage to boot. As a result, we must continually be refining our understanding of who God is and holding on to our beliefs with open hands.

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<sup>107</sup> Lewis, C. S., *The Great Divorce* (New York: HarperCollins, 1973), 40.

<sup>108</sup> Van Biema, David, “God Vs. Science,” *Time Magazine*, 13 November 2006, 55.



I think that it is essential for the church to hear the plea of Dawkins and others, that God is necessarily much bigger than our individual religious ideas and beliefs. There ought to be nothing threatening about this admission. To state that we have much more to learn about God doesn't negate the knowledge of him we do possess. It doesn't mean we must live in constant doubt or uncertainty. Instead it means we abandon our quest to have God all figured out, and instead to enter into the relationship and journey with God.

Jesus tells us that a life built on obedience to him is like building a house on a firm foundation. He also tells us that those who obey him He calls His friends. Our convictions, as Christians should be rooted in our true, intimate knowledge of God's heart and by it, our own.

As pastors, I believe it is imperative that we are assisting our congregations in becoming disciples who know and walk with God. We must shift our emphasis away from conversions and information and focus instead on bringing people into the presence of God. Studying God's word is invaluable, but only as a means of bringing us closer to being the people of God being the people of God.

One of the ways that God tells us this happens is in the midst of community. God intentionally uses the gathering of His body of believers to enter into our midst. We must welcome the diversity of the body as one of the key aspects to understanding the heart of God. Unity in diversity is not only who He is in essence, but also how we are to function together as his church. Our churches need to be places where we are growing in our intimacy with God and each other and actively taking part in this knowledge.

Although this may not be enough to satisfy the skepticism of Dawkins, it just might be the very thing humanity as a whole is longing for; for answers that are big

enough to answers the hardest questions, for intimacy deep enough to satisfy our true longings, and for substance that takes us beyond the material world to the very heart of God Himself.

## CHAPTER 10

### PRACTICALLY APPLYING A MODEST EPISTEMOLOGY

#### **Moving Past the Theoretical**

Polanyi's description of tacit knowing does more for me than simply illustrate the mechanism and processes for our attainment of knowledge. It casts vision for how we are able to increase in our ability to know both our present reality, and to see beyond our current limitations and to envision what lies beyond. It allows for us to move deeper and deeper into truth, to grow in our abilities as knowers and to help us to wisely discern where we are going.

I believe that, as pastors and church leaders, we must not only be personally involved in this kind of introspection and integration, but we need to be authentically modeling and mentoring our congregations in how to do the same. Polanyi's picture of an unending loop gives us a picture of the infinite nature of knowledge. When seen in light of true, spiritual reality, it is no surprise that knowledge is without finality. To know and glorify God is not only our chief end, but, in many ways is just the beginning. By demonstrating a modest epistemology, we are training self-starting disciples who will not only grasp the ownership of their own faith and beliefs, but also have vision that will carry them beyond themselves, to the mission and purposes of God's commission to entrust this to others.

## **Humility, Honesty, and Diversity from the Pulpit**

One of the things that my current church has employed is a rotation of teachers on Sunday Mornings. Being one of those in the rotation, I have grown to love and appreciate a process that is both fragile and risky, and, at the same time, incredibly powerful and instructive in the very system itself. It takes a lot more work and can be a bit disorienting for new attendees. But our church members have found in it a wonderful picture of both Christ's body at work, and the security of the commitment by the leadership holding their own interpretations as subordinate to the authority of scripture and in a healthy and balanced tension with the rest of the teaching team.

The system is fragile, because it only takes two bad responses to throw a significant wrench in the works. One speaker might overstate a position, tie themselves too closely to an overly sensitive issue, or criticize too specifically another member of the team. This rarely happens for us, but when it does, it has to be dealt with immediately. The speaker in question has to be reminded that he is not merely functioning as an individual speaker, but as a member of a team, and that team functioning properly trumps one's particular soapbox issue.

This happened one Sunday where my good friend spoke out a specific correction on my previous talk. I wasn't there that Sunday, but several other friends called me afterwards and said that he had taken a couple shots at me. Later, listening to a recording of the talk, I could understand what my friend was getting at. I also could understand how, based on our relationship, he might feel the freedom and comfortability to single me out as opposed to others on the team. I also realized that this simply wasn't the pressing issue, that misperceptions could easily lead to significant miscommunication, and also

that a habit of this type would lead to defensive overreactions and criticism from sermon to sermon. No one wants any part of that. Who wants to come to church on Sunday and hear the leaders bickering? Better to ditch the plurality than to create a further picture of the church incapable of living in unity and harmony.

I sat down with my friend and another pastor on staff and we brought up the issue of the slight against me. Initially it was very difficult for him to understand. After that, he was embarrassed, and even complained some months later that he was having trouble feeling a confidence in his voice during his sermons.

Looking back on this event, now several years past, it is exciting for me to see the process that has taken place between he and I. There is a greater respect and appreciation for one another; there is a greater sensitivity in his words, and a deeper character and humility in his presentation. I don't credit this entirely to his being on our preaching rotation. He now travels most of the year and is a nationally recognized speaker. I can't help but think that God was doing a specific work in his life by including him amongst a team. It requires more from us than we'd prefer, and yet is the very thing we need to grow in our ability to profess truth with modesty and moderation.

A church member once commented on the stability that comes from seeing the team interacting from up front with one another, making reference and support to others' talks, and sharing in the responsibility of shepherding. They mentioned that it was like being in a home where the parents are loving and supportive. It becomes a place of safety and authenticity. People are freed up to be who they are truly called to be, and are entitled, even encouraged, to examine carefully what is being taught and to ask themselves what they personally believe.

## Charitable Dialogue

### *Introspection*

The symposium, I believe, is another example of teaching and experiencing a modest epistemology at work. As I mentioned before, our church was beginning to strongly wrestle with questions about women's roles in leadership. Most people had strong convictions and beliefs, but not surprisingly, found it difficult to articulate what these beliefs were reliant on. They were focally aware that they were for it or against it, that scripture somehow was supportive of their position, and that those that disagreed were simply thickheaded conservatives or wishy-washy liberals.

As we prepared for the day, we intentionally selected a team of women and men to put together the agenda, to assess the goals, and to make recommendations after the event. The team selected a team of panelists that we believed would bring the proper amount of diversity, and yet model a similar spirit to what is displayed on our teaching team. The goal of these presentations was to demonstrate the orthodox diversity that exists over the issue, and to model a similar supremacy of the authority of scripture over humanity's interpretations. We made it clear that it was not a debate, but instead a charitable dialogue. They were simply to make a thirty-minute presentation, and then to participate in a brief time of comments and finally an audience Q & A.

We couldn't have picked a better team, and I am so confident that God was intimately involved in so many of these details. They truly modeled humility and charity without watering down the strength of their convictions.<sup>109</sup> What they did was to lead our

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<sup>109</sup> A DVD has been produced of this event, and can be made available as an additional appendix to this dissertation.

congregation into their own subsidiary awareness and to examine the beliefs of which they were only tacitly aware. Most of our congregation was fairly new to this level of examination, but everyone left feeling that a very healthy stretching had taken place. The issues had grown in their complexity, but so had both their respect for scripture and for each other, especially those of different opinion.

After the symposium, we sent out a survey to all church members who attended, had listened online, or had watched the DVD.<sup>110</sup> Our goal from the survey was to assess how our congregation had responded to the symposium and to assess the climate of the church in order to determine where to go from here.

As we examined the results, several things stood out to me that I found encouraging. First was that almost everyone that attended found the exercise beneficial. Secondly, it had had only a moderate effect on their personal beliefs. And finally, almost everyone was comfortable with the possibility of further discussion and exploration on the subject. I have to admit, after seeing the numbers I breathed another sigh of relief. Much of my faith in us as a congregation of Christ followers was affirmed. Also, deep down, I have to admit, I had a bit of a self-congratulatory moment. “I knew it”, I thought to myself.

I honestly am not trying to be self-deprecating nor boastful. I simply felt affirmed in my belief that we all desire to be able to act like grown ups in our faith, and this means being able to digest truth individually and corporately at a deep and meaningful level.

Paul says:

In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the

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<sup>110</sup> See Appendix D

teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.<sup>111</sup>

I feel like we, as a congregation, spent the day digesting some pretty solid meat.

While the meal itself was truly beneficial, the process of digestion seems to me to be vital in understanding true discipleship. We need believers to be skilled in the ability to discern truth, knowledge, and good and evil. It takes work, it requires character, but in the end, it yields the true and lasting fruit.

Paul challenges Timothy:

Keep reminding them of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly.<sup>112</sup>

This is what I love about Polanyi's epistemology. It beautifully ties together not only the commitment to truth and discovery, but to the maturity and skill of the mechanism itself. As we learn, we gain the art and skill of knowing. We mature not only in what we know, but also in how we know.

As a church, we spent the day pulling into focus what was known only proximally in our understanding of women in scripture. As we look at the scripture, at the original languages, and eventually at the meaning of single words in context, we were able to see the intricacies of our own beliefs, the complexity of much of our assumptions, and were able to take advantage of the opportunity to make changes to what had previously been only tacitly available to us. In doing this, we learn how to introspect. We learn from others how to unpack difficult bits of information, to break them down into manageable

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<sup>111</sup> Hebrews 5:12-14

<sup>112</sup> 2 Timothy 2:14-16



bites, and the process of interiorizing them into our own belief systems. We get to practice the art of knowing.

We accomplished much in that day, but honestly, we are only half way through the process. What is left is taking this newfound proximal knowledge, and putting it back into a useful form. If this process remains at this point, then the exercise, in many ways, will have failed. However, if we are able to see the results in a way that interiorizes the values, then we will have effectively completed the loop that Polanyi's epistemology diagrams for us.

### ***Integration***

As I mentioned already, we are still right in the middle of this process. We are taking the results of the survey and seeking to interpret what the data means. This is always easier said than done, and the imperfections in our survey process are becoming clear. However, this is our first time doing this, and we feel like we are charting new territory for our church. Frankly, there are going to be mistakes. Hopefully this can help us to learn and understand this process, this epistemology, and we can use this information to course correct for the future.

As I presented this data before our elder board, I saw a lot of the old emotions come back. Definitely there is fear and worry regarding the potential changes ahead. Again, we are stepping off our map, and without much support from outside sources. There are several on our board that, I know, were hoping that the data would come back inconclusive. It is one thing to be introspective about our proximal knowledge, but

turning around and really integrating it back in holistically requires action, it requires flesh and blood. It is incarnational. And because of this, it is messy.

We might lose some members of our church over the next few months, and that is difficult to swallow. It will feel like we are treating this particular issue disproportionately. But the fact is that people leave, change, and move on. The question becomes, where is God leading us, and do we have the courage to follow? It requires a lot from us. It takes courage.

However, I remain hopeful that we can keep everyone. I think that the key here is our pace. As we make determinations from the survey and from conversations and discussions with our church members and leadership, what we are determining is a trajectory, a direction in which to head. But once this direction becomes clear, we must keep in mind that the movement forward is to be done together. We don't go running off ahead and leave others behind. We move forward together, like a band of pioneers, looking out for each other and helping to carry each other's load.

I believe that this patient leading forward is so clearly demonstrated by God Himself, as he has lead the Israelites of Old, as he formed the New Testament church of Acts, how the gospel evolved into gentile culture, and how we see it manifesting itself today in our postmodern world. As Len Sweet has said many times in class, on some issues, God has a longer wavelength than we do. He is patient, and yet, no less determined to see His work come to completion. We must have humility and hold the timing of these things with the same, openhanded posture as our new theory of knowledge requires.

## **Team Leadership**

One last area that I see our church modeling a modest epistemology is in our team approach to leadership. Although we technically still have a senior pastor by title, his role is very atypical compared to most. He is not the final authority, nor the place where the buck stops. He is not the primary visionary, nor the CEO. In actuality, he is primarily the worship leader and with that role, the primary facilitator for Sunday mornings.

The role of authoritative leadership is carried, primarily by our elder board. It is where decisions are made, roles are assigned, and responsibility is delegated. Authority is intentionally flattened and shared amongst the team of leaders, and responsibility is shouldered equally by all.

At least that is the idea. Again, it is not a perfect system, and much of how it functions and operates has emerged fairly organically. But we are continuing to seek to understand the model and to determine how to more fully embrace the virtues described in our teaching rotation amongst the primary leadership team.

One of the benefits that I see here in particular, but also in the areas already discussed, is a much higher demand for investment. There is not one person at the helm, making decisions, carrying the brunt of responsibility alone, and always ending up the last to leave. The shepherding is being done by those also involved in the finances. There becomes very little distinction between the title of pastor and elder.

Given where I've come from in ministry, I love this approach. It allows for authenticity in our leadership styles as well as honesty about our weaknesses and limitations. It encourages interdependence amongst the team and dispels the myth of

pastors as a holistic picture of leadership. Instead, the team becomes a smaller scale modeling of the body of Christ.

### **Just the Beginning**

These are just three areas where I see a modest epistemology at work in our church. There also exists a wonderful blending amongst charismatic and non-charismatic worshippers in our services, and a true acceptance and balance in the exercising of supernatural gifts of the spirit. I believe a significant part of the freedom that is felt by our church stems from having both conservative evangelicals and Pentecostal evangelicals in the leadership and preaching teams of the church. As our leadership is able to maintain the same spirit and unity of heart, the church is able to comfortably find their own place and expression within the body.

But we certainly have a long way to go. This is why I have termed this modest epistemology an epistemology of hope. It is constantly looking forward, seeking to bring the kingdom to earth as it is in heaven, but to do so incrementally, in obedience to God's will and plan. Because of this, I am confident that we are merely scratching the surface of what God wants the church to be and become. It is not an exercise that we try out every once in a while. Instead, as we lead our churches in applying this model of knowing, it becomes more than what we do, it becomes who we are, and the fruit and inner transformation that occurs with the interiorization of this practice is simply derivative from the living out of our lives on earth.

## CHAPTER 11

### RE-IMAGINING CHURCH LEADERSHIP IN LIGHT OF A NEW EPISTEMOLOGY

#### **An Incarnation of the Gospel**

So, what does it mean to be an “emergent church”? I find myself less and less concerned with the answer to that question. Things simply are changing, and I am so excited to see and feel its effects, to see where it leads us, and to be a part of the change. We need it so badly.

I was talking recently with a man in our church named Howard. He had only just started attending our church at the behest of his teenage daughter. He was intelligent and opinionated, as well as being very religiously jaded. He had asked another member of our church if he ought to attend the women in ministry symposium. They cautiously told him no. “You don’t want to see our church air their dirty laundry.”

When I heard the comment I felt disappointed, but also found inside me a new burst of determination. I could understand the particular member’s concern. We generally don’t behave ourselves well in theological disagreements. Who wants to listen to a bunch of closed-minded churchgoers berate one another over whose interpretation of the bible is most accurate? But I knew that if this went well, it just might be the thing that made it click for Howard.

The spirit of the day of the symposium was incredibly refreshing and the fruit was immediately evident. Any spirit of contention was lifted by the end of the day and everyone left with a look of peace and reassurance. Even though we had been exposed to more information than any of us could hope to process through in seven hours, we had

also been exposed to a much greater truth. We had been able to see past the immediate issues to the humanity of those presenting or those with different opinions than our own. It had become clear that how we treated one another during the discussion trumps the subject matter in significance. And most of all, that the maturity demonstrated in listening and respecting, and considering others as more important than ourselves provides the security that there is more going on than just men and women behaving themselves. As one attendee put it, “it is so evident that God is doing something here, and that there is no one that can take the credit for it but Him.”

I preached several Sundays later on the incarnation of Christ providing the vision for us living incarnational lives that manifest the gospel of Jesus. Howard came up to me afterward in tears. Looking at him, I could tell that something had clicked. It all made sense to him in a way that he could finally get behind with his integrity intact. The gospel was not about managing appearances, but actually making a difference. He had hope.

I believe that this is the essence of what the emerging church is about. It is about movement, further up and further in, as we grow ever nearer to God’s coming kingdom. As we do, our lives become a manifestation of the light of this hope to a world that is desperate for meaning.

### **Fully Functioning Christians**

Bill Hybels recently made a public apology for the fact that his church, Willow Creek, had failed in its goal to raise up fully functioning Christians. I have to admit that my first reaction was a bit condescending. His church represents the heart of the seeker movement whose roots were largely based on convenience and customer satisfaction.

Why would he be surprised that his shortening Sunday messages to 15 minute gospel presentations wasn't raising up disciples of Jesus?

But, toward the end of his talk, he mentioned that the extensive survey his conclusions were based on had been handed out to a wide variety of churches with differing backgrounds, sizes, denominations, and philosophies of ministry, with much the same results. In other words, the church as a whole is not raising up fully functioning disciples of Jesus.

As I listened to these words, I found myself truly convicted. Is my church accomplishing this great commission? What does it take to accomplish this goal? Bill Hybles didn't necessarily have an answer, but he did know one thing. What Christians don't need is more information, programs, or sermons.

I believe he is right, and that the answer to this question of discipleship lies in the very epistemological dilemma I've been addressing. We need spiritually mature followers of Jesus that are truly in relationship with Him, not just a system of doctrines. While information is extremely important to younger believers, as we grow, it can easily become the end in itself. When this happens, a believer's spiritual growth can begin to calcify. We become like distant friends with God, confident that we've got him figured out, when, in actuality, we are losing touch. Our intimacy begins to wither and our faith becomes more and more exclusively cognitive.

### **The Church of the Future**

If one were to write up the beatitudes of the predominant Christian leadership model today, it would probably go something like this: Blessed are the charismatic, for

they will be admired. Blessed are the intelligent, for they will receive respect. Blessed are the charming, for they will be adored. Blessed are the creative, for they will be thought insightful. Blessed are the authoritative, for they will get results.

In order for the church to lead, people need to see God, not us. They need to see His power, and a story worth giving their lives to. I believe that when church leadership is functioning properly, it becomes a reflection of His glory and truth, and not our own. It requires us to be completely transparent. As I conclude this dissertation, I want to identify three characteristics that I believe a healthy emerging church will manifest, that its leadership must strive for.

### **Christ Centered Leadership**

In 1 Corinthians, Paul says, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”<sup>113</sup> This phrase demonstrates the difficult tension that a Christian leader must exist in. A true leader is a model, and to model is to draw attention to yourself. Yet the command is much more of a transitive property of leadership. The goal is that others are following Christ, and imitating the leader only as he is obedient to Jesus. But when most of the church is looking to the pastor to model what it means to follow Christ, there becomes a conundrum. How do people know when we are or aren’t following Christ?

I think that leaders must understand this potential dilemma and seek to cast vision in the church for people to become self-educators. We need to be wary of becoming Bible answer persons, and instead push people back into learning to study their Bibles and seeking to know God’s heart. Only when this is happening do we have the appropriate accountability from our congregations.

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<sup>113</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:1



At the same time, we must be careful to scrutinize our actions and recognize the high calling and responsibility that comes from shepherding others. We are being held to a higher standard of judgment for our actions based on this. We must be wary of becoming an example of more than Christ.

This is the danger of leading exclusively from our strengths. When our strengths are all that are displayed, we set up a false, and unattainable standard. Those that can't make it, (and honestly, who can?), feel as if there is something wrong with their faith, when really they may be doing better than the leader they are seeking to emulate. Those that do attain a similar persona inevitably become spiritually proud, the very thing which Jesus most strongly condemned.

This is why some of the most powerful demonstrations of God's power come through our weaknesses. Leading from weakness is so counter-cultural. We don't do it. We avoid it at all costs. And yet, when our weakness is displayed, we also display a heart of true obedience. This type of obedience makes one completely at the disposal of God's will, and there is simply no more powerful place to be. When we place ourselves under God's authority, we are capable of raising the dead, speaking words of knowledge, and ministering right to the heart of people's needs. We can speak against spiritual principalities and rebuke sin. We can do all of this with a heart of true humility coupled with the strength of God's authority.

The idea of leading a life of decreasing significance is another idea that goes against the very fabric of our being. As John the Baptist stated so eloquently, "He must

increase, but I must decrease.”<sup>114</sup> We all long for glory in some way, shape, or form. We invest our time in what is profitable, not just monetarily, but in stature as well.

## **Honesty and Authenticity**

In order to lead from a place of authority requires humble obedience. But humility demonstrates much more than a willingness to be used. It displays the hope of the gospel. The power of Jesus’ message was that it was for all humanity, but especially for the sick, the weak, and the outcasts. When we project an image of our self that is without spot or blemish, we essentially are trying to project an image of strength or to place ourselves in a position of lesser need.

I remember reading a leadership model by Brian McLaren comparing our current leadership style to that of the wizard in the Wizard of Oz. When Toto pulls back the curtain, he reveals a little old man, not a grand and illustrious magician. His suggestion is that we should lead more like Dorothy, aware of our problems and leading others towards the common solution. But in order to do this, we must be aware of our weaknesses and not be afraid to invite others into them. This is what is required if we are to truly live in community. There must be vulnerability. There must be intimacy. We cannot have this without honesty.

Being honest is incredibly risky, but can be the most powerful examples of the gospel message. I can remember a time when the person doing announcements at our church made a blunder that came across as an inappropriate joke about the homosexual community in our city. Everyone in the church felt the awkwardness of the humor, but most simply shook it off. One lady, a fairly new congregant, stood up and made the

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<sup>114</sup> John 3:30

statement that she was glad that some of her friends weren't with her that morning because she was ashamed of what had been said. More than that, she was ashamed that many had snickered at the slight. The man doing announcements, a layperson, simply acknowledged his blunder and asked the woman's forgiveness. It was such a vulnerable, honest moment where I saw God's power displayed in weakness. I remember thinking that we didn't need a sermon after that. We had all experienced a picture of forgiveness and honesty that I know I will continue to cherish.

### **Inclusiveness**

When we display humility and honesty in our leadership, we create a place of safety for those that need to experience grace. We create a space where healing can take place. We communicate to others that there is a place where they belong.

So much of the world is telling us the very opposite. We are told that we don't have what it takes or that if we change something about ourselves or alter our appearance then we will fit in. But even those that are able to manage the appearances live with a constant, often subconscious fear of being found out.

It is revealed in the way we present ourselves, in our humor and joking, in our sarcasm, and in our defensiveness. We all have it. It is a constant battle. The answer requires an ability to truly see and recognize another and to love them more than we love our selves. As leaders, we must be operating from a position of understanding God's unconditional love for us. This not only frees us from our fears, but reminds us of the danger that we are to ourselves if our pride is given reign. We must seek for ways to

dispel any projected images that do not reflect who we truly are, and to not take credit for more than we deserve.

If we are going to reach this world, a world that is desperately looking for true connections, for authenticity, and unconditional love, then we must be willing to acknowledge that our need is as great as theirs, but that through Jesus we can have the courage and confidence to lead from our weaknesses as well as our strengths and to do so with humility, courage, and authenticity. I believe that this is the calling for the future church.

APPENDIX A

TACIT KNOWLEDGE DIAGRAM

A NEW PARADIGM

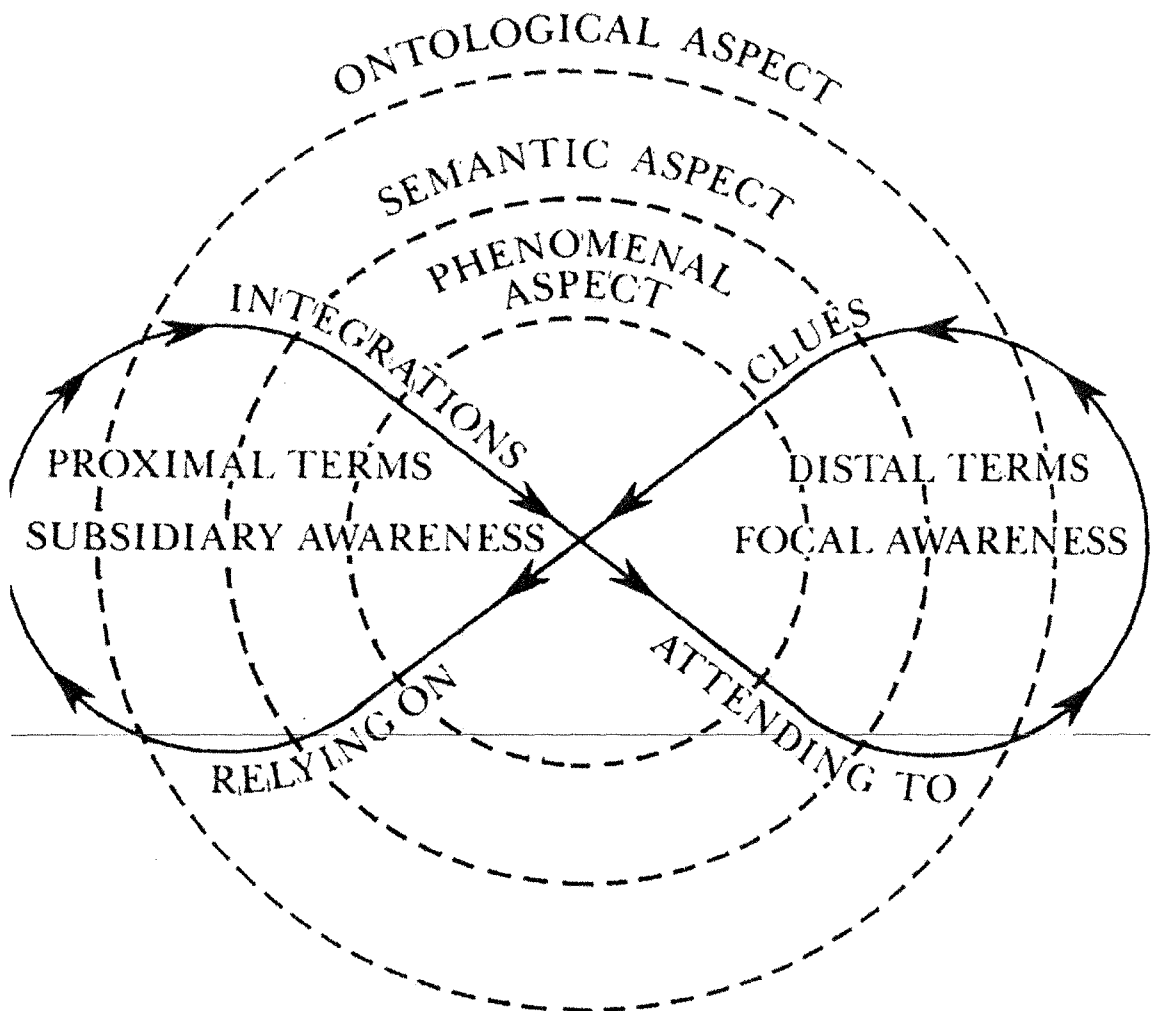


Diagram of Tacit Knowing

## APPENDIX B

### INVITATION TO THE CONGREGATION

Dear church member,

I would like to personally invite you to attend the Symposium on "Women's Roles in Ministry" that is taking place at our church on Saturday, November 10<sup>th</sup> from 9 am to 4 pm. As the date approaches, I wanted to take a minute and share with each of you the vision for the day.

There is no question that the topic we are addressing is a significant one, for our church and for the church as a whole. As questions have been raised amongst various members of our body, the elders have sought to find a way that we might step into these questions with intentionality. We want to avoid divisions, we want to understand God's heart in this matter, and we desire that the pursuit of truth would, in the end, bring Him glory.

In Ephesians, Paul prays this prayer for their church that they might, "be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen."

I love those words! One of the things that I've been struck with in our recent studies of 1 Corinthians is how important it is that this pursuit of the fullness of God takes place amongst the community of the saints. We need each other...by design. The pursuit of the knowledge of God requires us to take on the qualities of his character, most importantly that of love. Without love, the nobility of searching the scriptures is lost. Without love we cannot have understanding, but instead fall into bickering and disharmony. But to seek God together in love reveals not only His character, but Himself in our midst.

In order for this to happen requires a couple things. First of all we need participation. We need our church body to come and take part in this symposium together. We need the entire body represented. No one is more significant than another. We will be providing child-care in order to simplify the logistics of the day and lunch will be provided. Hopefully we can ALL be there.

Secondly, we need to come with humility and openness. Let me reassure you that the authority of scripture in this discussion is unquestioned. We are not interested in playing "hermeneutical" games, using God's words to defend what we already believe. Instead, we will be examining the scriptures together, as well as hearing from four presenters who represent some breadth and expertise in the discussion.

Each of these four is committed to the doctrinal principles that our church holds to.

Thirdly, we need to come with confidence and not fear. 2 Timothy 1:7 says, "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love and, of a sound mind." The elders are confident that this is truly something God is doing in our midst.

My encouragement to you would be that you would not only attend the symposium, but that you would spend some time in preparation for the day. We've included in this packet of materials a list of the key scripture passages for you to read through and acquaint yourself with. This should be your starting point. Spend time in prayerful consideration of these passages and pay attention to your questions and places of needed clarification.

It is our hope that these articles (many from our symposium speakers) will provide some additional perspective in preparation for the day. What a blessing to have such learned speakers in such an intimate setting! There will be time for interaction at the end as well as a chance to raise unanswered questions.

We will be giving out a take-home survey to all church members regarding women's roles in ministry. The elders are truly desirous to know how we, as a congregation, are responding to the process. We want to understand more clearly what God is doing in the life of this body as a whole and how to use this survey information in determining how to remain obediently in God's will.

I am so looking forward to this! I pray that God uses the time leading up to the symposium to reveal Himself to each of us more fully. As it says in 1 Thessalonians 5:21, "But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good." Amen!

Blessings,

Jeff Tacklind  
Assistant Pastor  
Church by the Sea

## APPENDIX C

### KEY PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE SENT OUT TO CONGREGATION

#### Key Passages of Scripture Related to Roles of Women and Men

Here are some of the more pertinent Scriptures pertaining to our topic. I would encourage each of you to spend some time reading through these verses, examining the context in which they take place, and writing down any questions that come to mind. I would also encourage you to spend some time digesting these passages before moving on to any of the articles or additional resources provided. It is our desire that God's written word hold the place of highest authority in these discussions, and and that we keep in mind these words are alive and active. May God reveal Himself to each of us as we meditate on His words.

Genesis 1-3	Regarding questions of design, headship, and equality.
Judges 4	Deborah, a prophetess and judge of Israel.
1 Corinthians 11:2-16	Head coverings, prophecy, and authority
1 Corinthians 14:33-36	Women being silent in the church
Galatians 3:28	Hierarchical distinctions
Ephesians 5:21-33	Husbands and Wives
1 Timothy 2:11-15	Not to teach or have authority...more easily deceived.
1 Peter 3:1-7	Women as the weaker sex.



## APPENDIX D

### SYMPOSIUM SURVEY

## WOMEN IN MINISTRY SYMPOSIUM

### Church Member Survey

Dear Church Member,

Thank you for taking the time to fill out the enclosed survey. Our desire, as the Symposium Planning Committee, is to accurately assess the climate and beliefs of our church body. Your honest reflection and answers to these questions are crucial to this process.

In many ways, this day represents more than the specific topic of women in ministry. While we believe this subject is a critical discussion for the wellness of our church, our long-term goal is that we would also be able to use what we've experienced and learned as a part of our approach to growing and maturing in both unity and diversity as a body.

Take some time to look over and reflect on the survey questions and fill them out as objectively and fairly as possible. Only with an honest assessment can we hope to accurately understand our existing climate on these issues. Your responses will be kept anonymous. The committee will meet to tally the results and will make their findings publicly available.

An enclosed, self addressed envelope is enclosed for your convenience. Please mail in or return your completed survey to the Symposium Planning Committee within several days of the symposium or the viewing of the DVD. Please send in no later than November 25<sup>th</sup>.

1. What was your overall impression of the symposium?

- ☐ Favorable
- ☐ Somewhat Favorable
- ☐ Somewhat Unfavorable
- ☐ Unfavorable

2. What part of the symposium did you attend?  
(Check all the apply)

- ☐ Morning
- ☐ Luncheon
- ☐ Afternoon
- ☐ Viewed the DVD
- ☐ None of the above

3. I feel that the topic of the symposium was

- ☐ Relevant
- ☐ Somewhat Relevant
- ☐ Somewhat Irrelevant
- ☐ Irrelevant

4. How did you feel about the information presented at the symposium?

- ☐ Engaging
- ☐ Somewhat engaging
- ☐ Somewhat disengaging
- ☐ Disengaging

5. How fairly and objectively do you feel the overall subject was addressed in the symposium?

- ☐ Fairly
- ☐ Somewhat Fairly
- ☐ Somewhat Unfairly
- ☐ Unfairly

6. How much of the reading material did you review?

- ☐ None of the Articles
- ☐ Some of the articles
- ☐ Most
- ☐ All

7. How helpful did you find the information provided in the articles?

- ☐ Helpful
- ☐ Somewhat Helpful
- ☐ Somewhat Unhelpful
- ☐ Unhelpful

8. How fairly do you feel the articles presented the overall subject matter?

- ☐ Fairly
- ☐ Somewhat Fairly
- ☐ Somewhat Unfairly
- ☐ Unfairly

9. Did you grow up in a church with women in leadership? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Sunday School
- ☐ Worship Leader
- ☐ Elder
- ☐ As a Senior Pastor
- ☐ Not Applicable

10. How well informed do you feel you were on the subject of women in ministry before the articles and symposium?

- ☐ I was uninformed on the subject
- ☐ I was moderately informed
- ☐ I was very informed

11. How well informed do you feel after the event?

- ☐ Uninformed
- ☐ Minimally informed
- ☐ Moderately informed
- ☐ Well informed

12. How were your views affected by the reading of the articles?

- ☐ My views were unaffected
- ☐ Moderately effected
- ☐ Significantly effected

13. If your views changed, which direction did they move?

- ☐ Towards a more Egalitarian perspective
- ☐ Towards a more Complementarian perspective
- ☐ Towards a more Traditionalist perspective

14. Which of the speakers do you feel you were most in agreement with?

- ☐ Bob Saucy
- ☐ Walt Liefeld
- ☐ Judy TenElshof
- ☐ Ron Pierce

15. How well do you feel the speakers did in accurately handling the scriptures?

- ☐ Very well
- ☐ Adequately well
- ☐ Inadequately
- ☐ Poorly

16. How comfortable do you feel with a woman teaching both men and women in a small group?

- ☐ Very comfortable
- ☐ Comfortable
- ☐ Uncomfortable
- ☐ Very uncomfortable

17. How comfortable are you with a woman sharing a teaching role on a Sunday Morning?

- ☐ Very comfortable
- ☐ Comfortable
- ☐ Uncomfortable
- ☐ Very uncomfortable

18. How comfortable are you with a woman teaching from the pulpit?

- ☐ Very comfortable
- ☐ Comfortable
- ☐ Uncomfortable
- ☐ Very uncomfortable

19. How comfortable are you with a woman on the pastoral staff?

- ☐ Very comfortable
- ☐ Comfortable
- ☐ Uncomfortable
- ☐ Very uncomfortable

20. How comfortable are you with women having the title of Senior Pastor?

- ☐ Very comfortable
- ☐ Comfortable
- ☐ Uncomfortable
- ☐ Very uncomfortable

21. How do you feel about women in the role of elder?

- ☐ Very comfortable
- ☐ Comfortable
- ☐ Uncomfortable
- ☐ Very uncomfortable

22. How well do you feel your questions were addressed and answered?

- ☐ Very well
- ☐ Adequately well
- ☐ Inadequately
- ☐ Poorly

23. How comfortable are you with our church having public discussions addressing these issues?

- ☐ Very comfortable
- ☐ Comfortable
- ☐ Uncomfortable
- ☐ Very uncomfortable

24. With respect to exploring these issues related to women's roles in ministry, how comfortable are you with the pace of our process?

- ☐ We are moving too Quickly
- ☐ Somewhat quickly
- ☐ At the Right Pace
- ☐ Somewhat Slow
- ☐ Too Slowly

25. Are you comfortable with leadership continuing to explore the role of women in ministry in our church?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

☐ Unsure

26. How informed are you with our churches existing policies on women in leadership?

- ☐ Uninformed
- ☐ Minimally informed
- ☐ Moderately informed
- ☐ Well informed

27. How do you feel about our current policies? (i.e. male teaching rotation and male eldership)

- ☐ Very comfortable
- ☐ Comfortable
- ☐ Uncomfortable
- ☐ Very uncomfortable

28. How comfortable would you be with any of these policies changing?

- ☐ Very comfortable
- ☐ Comfortable
- ☐ Uncomfortable
- ☐ Very uncomfortable

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