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Interplace: Incarnating Christ's Kingdom Community in the Emerging Culture by a Missional Approach that Creates Safe Spaces for Sharing Stories and Developing Organic Relationships

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INTERPLACE:

INCARNATING CHRIST'S KINGDOM COMMUNITY IN THE EMERGING
CULTURE BY A MISSIONAL APPROACH THAT CREATES SAFE SPACES FOR
SHARING PERSONAL STORIES AND DEVELOPING ORGANIC RELATIONSHIPS

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

BY

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REDLANDS, CALIFORNIA

MARCH 2009

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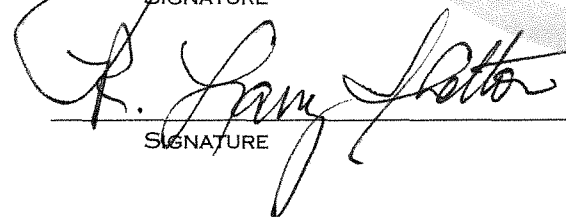
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DEVELOPING ORGANIC RELATIONSHIPS**

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THIS PROJECT AND APPROVE IT AS ADEQUATE IN
SCOPE AND QUALITY TO COMPLETE THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY IN
LEADERSHIP IN THE EMERGING CULTURE DEGREE**


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GEORGE FOX
EVANGELICAL SEMINARY

ABSTRACT

Title: INTERPLACE: INCARNATING CHRIST'S KINGDOM COMMUNITY IN THE EMERGING CULTURE BY A MISSION APPROACH THAT CREATES SAFE SPACES FOR SHARING PERSONAL STORIES AND DEVELOPING ORGANIC RELATIONSHIPS

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The traditional propositional and proclamational forms of evangelism implemented during the modern era are diminishing in their effectiveness to share the Gospel and bring people into God's Kingdom community. The attractional paradigm is out of harmony with the current trends exhibited in emerging culture. There are possible solutions to this problem, such as modifying traditional methodologies and incorporating contemporary media, music, and technology; developing ministries that meet postmodern needs but on an attractional basis; or ignoring emerging concerns and maintaining modern era techniques. Any of these solutions have marginal or no impact as reported by research that reveals the minimal impact Christianity has on Western, postmodern cultures.

This paper's thesis is that Christians can effectively embody the Gospel in the emerging culture through a missional approach that creates safe spaces for sharing personal stories and developing organic relationships. The result is the birthing the Kingdom Jesus proclaims in the Gospels.

This methodology may be effective because the emerging culture defines its spiritual life through experiential modes more than propositional statements. Postmodern model proponents believe individuals can realize their full personhood only within community interrelationships. Members of the emerging culture desire inclusion versus exclusion, and relationships based on love, authenticity, and openness must be established that embody Christ in the emerging culture. The project book will contain resources that enable readers to understand the dynamics of the emerging culture and create safe spaces for sharing stories and building relationships in which the *Missio Dei* is experienced. The book provides easy access to the material and makes it available to a broad public.

SECTION 1

THE PROBLEM

The Western church's attractional, propositional evangelistic endeavors designed to impact people with the Gospel are increasingly ineffective through a lack of congruency with the societal trends of the emerging culture. I see this every day in my unique and specific ministerial context. I work and serve in a graduate health sciences university consisting of diverse cultures, nationalities, beliefs, and lifestyles. It is an institution whose heritage is Seventh-day Adventist Christianity. As the Campus Chaplain for Loma Linda University, I find myself in a microcosm of the larger society.

The student demographics of the campus are:

- The average student is 27 years old with a range from 18 to 40+ years.
- Undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate level students study in health professional programs.
- Individuals come from 80+ different countries.
- Students come from 65+ different religions and denominations, the prominent segment being Seventh-day Adventist Christians, and to those who are atheists.

The campus is an emerging, cross-cultural, cross-generational, and global community. The traditional means of communicating the Christian faith do not engage the curiosity and questions of this populace. Effective evangelism must communicate the Gospel to them in cogent and engaging ways and I envision new ways to share Christianity that empower and inform their spiritual journeys. Having once engaged

them, I intend to identify and/or develop ways that encourage their full participation in Christ's Kingdom community.

My goal is not to be a chef that cooks up a new evangelistic recipe. Rather, I want to be a midwife that assists in the miracle birth of Christ's Kingdom of Heaven on this campus. In order to address these issues, I believe safe spaces must be created for sharing personal stories and the Gospel with members of the emerging culture. This will enable the development of natural enculturation and organic relationships that establishes the full realization of Christ's kingdom through personification in community.

SECTION 2

OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Many churches have used various propositional and proclamational style evangelistic methods but modified the presentation through media, music, and technological advances to look more postmodern. This has a positive effect because it attracts postmodern individuals, but it is only of transitory value. The propositional and attractional emphasis becomes self-evident, and the community and interaction that are sought after by the emerging culture do not exist.

Some churches have developed attractional model ministries that seem to address the concerns of postmoderns, but the model advocates only seek to convert people into their culture instead of involving the emerging culture missionally.¹ These types of ministry do have some impact and meet certain needs, but they lack the inherent qualities that draw and develop sustained relationships with members of the emerging culture.

Other churches maintain traditional ways and means, and believe they will weather the temporary storm of postmodernism. These entrenched methods increase numerical growth; however, the growth comes from within the church community that clings to the same outlook. Many Christians view becoming a part of Christ's kingdom as a "coming out of the world." In contrast, the emerging viewpoint embraces the good

¹ Some representative examples of this are the Seeker Sensitive model of Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, IL (<http://www.willowcreek.org>), and the Purpose Driven model of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, CA (<http://www.saddleback.com>).

things God does in the world and partners with it. The traditional, attractional model has negligible, if any, positive impact on the emerging culture.

SECTION 3

THE THESIS

The concept of evangelism is not new. The followers of Jesus have spread the gospel and helped establish his Kingdom following Christ's directive at his ascension to "Go and make disciples" (Matt. 28:16-20). Within the context of postmodernity, however, traditional methods of evangelism sputter or become ineffectual. Plummeting conversion rates, withering membership and attendance, and statistical research confirm these trends. Another way may impact contemporary cultures with the scope and connectivity Christ envisioned.

The thesis of this paper is that Christians can effectively embody the gospel in the emerging culture by adopting a missional approach that creates safe spaces for sharing personal stories and developing organic relationships with others. The purpose of this paper is to explore and understand the paradigm shift of modernism to postmodernism, how this shift impacts the church and its communication of the gospel, and how Jesus' followers can fulfill the *Missio Dei* in relationships, conversations, and community.

Paradigms of Modernism and Postmodernism

This section explores the paradigms of modernism and postmodernism, and it provides an overview of the assumptions of the paradigms in secular society. Second, this

chapter explores modernism and postmodernism as expressed through the concepts of the modern church and the emerging church.

The modern paradigm has distinctive characteristics. Leonard Sweet, Brian McLaren, and Terry Haselmayer provide a concise and insightful definition of modernity in their book, *A is for Abductive: The Language of the Emerging Church*.¹ They reference Martin Luther and his statement, “Here I stand,” and use the acronym HIS as a description of modernity:

Here=Present: Modernity focused on the here and now. It understood itself as having moved beyond the past.

I=Individualism: Descartes’ later dictum “I think therefore I am” doubled the emphasis on “I”—the individual knower, the autonomous individual increasingly disconnected from both the human community and the Creator.

Stand=Static Propositions and Stable Physical Laws: The modern world was confident that, just as there were discernable laws that governed the physical universe, there were free-floating moral laws and spiritual standards upon which one could stand in certainty . . . Modernity as a broad cultural movement has pursued several key themes:

Conquest/control: Of nature by technology; of mystery by research and analysis; of flaws in human nature by institutions.

Mechanization: Machines have become not only the tools of conquest, but also the metaphor by which we understand ourselves, our world, and even God.

Rationalism/secular science: Using empirical analysis and experimentation, all mysteries can be replaced with knowledge and all problems can be solved with technology.

¹ Leonard I. Sweet, Brian D. McLaren, and Terry Haselmayer, “A” *Is for Abductive: The Language of the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 199-200.

Reductionism: The belief that big things can be understood by breaking them down into smaller constituent parts, and that the ultimate truth of things is discovered in their analysis, dissection, or reduction.

Individualism: A valuing of individual liberties and pursuits, and a suspicion of any reality that limits individual freedom and desire.

Consumerism/materialism: A shared goal of both capitalism and communism (modernity's two primary economic systems), based on the belief that money will in fact buy happiness that is to be had.²

Concise definitions of postmodernism are more difficult. The consensus is that postmodernism is a work in progress, and its full dimensions are not conclusively discerned or delineated. This is illustrated by David Morley's assertion in *Cultural Studies and Communications*:

Postmodernism has been the subject of intense debate in recent years and yet it remains unclear, to many people, what the phenomenon actually amounts to. Those writing about postmodernism exhibit no central consensus as to what it actually refers, in concrete terms, and those who have criticized the whole postmodern project aim their barbs at quite disparate parties.³

Morley utilizes D. Hebdige's analysis of postmodernism as a series of negations of modernism: the rejection of totalization, teleology, and utopianism:

1. *Against totalization ("no total solutions"):* By this, Hebdige refers to the widespread rejection of all the generalizing aspirations of the Enlightenment—all those discourses which set out to define an essential human nature, to prescribe a particular destiny to human history and to define collective human goals. Thus, postmodernists reject the universalist claims of modernist discourses.

2. *Against teleology ("you can't know anything for certain"):* By this, Hebdige means the increasing skepticism in postmodern circles, regarding the ideal of decidable origins and causes in human affairs, as evinced by any form of 'depth

² Ibid., 199-200.

³ James Curran, David Morley, and Valerie Walkerdine, eds. *Cultural Studies and Communications* (London: Arnold, 1996), 50.

model' of the universe (which unites all modernist discourses, such as Marxism, psychoanalysis and structuralism).

3. *Against Utopia* ("don't go mistaking paradise for that home across the road"): The third negation, according to Dick Hebdige, is that of any notion (or model) of a Utopia, against which present societies might be judged and found wanting. The problem, it is argued, is that once you set out on this road, fortified by notions like having "God" or "history" on your side . . . you end up instigating a terroristic process, justifying the elimination of your enemies by reference to the ultimate justice of your goal and the rightness of your cause.⁴

Another aspect of postmodernism has to do with the development of virtual communities⁵ as a replacement for the more traditional, communal structures of modernity. A community was previously determined on a geographical basis (where you lived and who you lived by); community is now often developed in the virtual realm and the medium of the Internet. Virtual communities form around common bonds and interests versus the boundaries such as suburban, rural, or urban neighborhoods. Mark Poster highlights these concepts in his essay entitled, "Postmodern Virtualities":

Electronic media are supporting an equally profound transformation of cultural identity. Telephone, radio, film, television, the computer and now their integration as 'multimedia' reconfigure words, sounds and images so as to cultivate new configurations of individuality. If modern society may be said to foster an individual who is rational, autonomous, centered and stable . . . then perhaps a postmodern society is emerging which nurtures forms of identity different from, even opposite to those of modernity.⁶

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ An example of a virtual community is Second Life (www.secondlife.com).

⁶ Meenakshi Durham and Douglas Kellner, eds., *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 612.

Communicating the Gospel: Modern and Postmodern

This cursory excursion into the modern and postmodern discussion reveals a tectonic cultural shift. The shift affects every aspect of society, and the church is no exception. The following diagram utilizes the concept of a prism where light enters the prismatic structure and is divergently reflected due to the angle of the indices. In a similar manner, the paradigms of modernism and postmodernism affect the communication and dissemination of the Gospel.

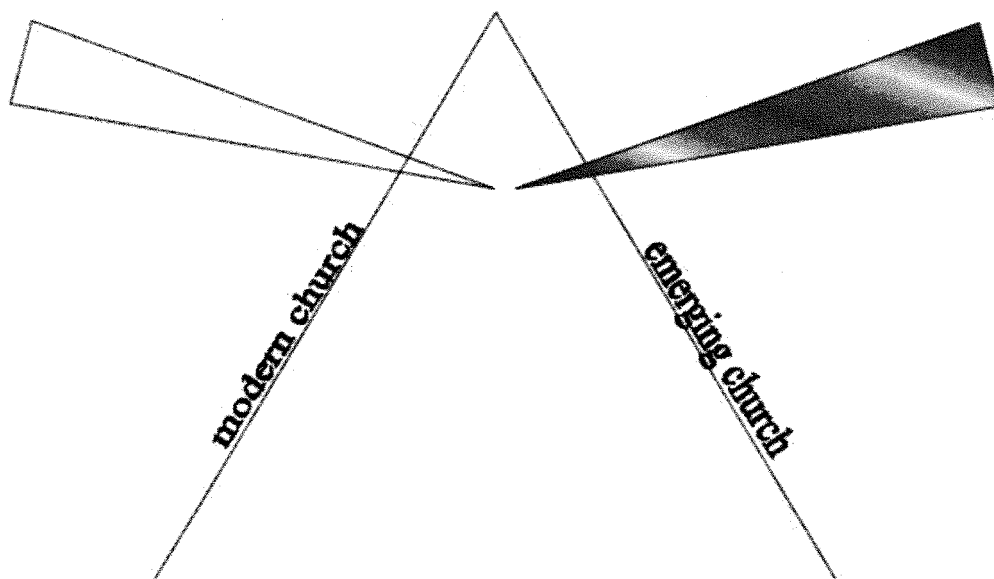


Figure 1. The modern church and the emerging church

In figure 1, one of the refractive indices represents the modern church, and the other refractive index represents the emerging church. The white light represents the gospel as it is disseminated through the indices. The gospel, the *kerygma* of Christianity, remains unchanged; however, as the white light is changed by passing through an index

in a prism, the gospel is also affected by the indices it passes through. The gospel's presentation and praxis are affected by the "planes" through which it passes, but Christ's command remains:

Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20).

Matthew proclaims Christ's concluding statements and great commandment to his faithful followers before leaving the earth and ascending to heaven. These words formulate the gospel imperative that Christianity share the mission and message of Christ with all the world's inhabitants. The gospel⁷ is not a set of stagnant doctrines or fossilized formulas and creeds. The gospel is the story of the incarnate Christ who lived out relationships with the people and the cultures around him (Mark 1:1, 13:10; Rom. 1:16). It is the story of how God's Kingdom is re-established and repopulated on this earth in anticipation of his second coming.

Key questions include: We have encountered the gospel in our lives, but how and where do we share it and live it? What are the differences, if any, between how evangelism—the sharing of the gospel—is effectively engaged in a modern context and a

⁷ When the term "the gospel" is used throughout this essay, it follows the definition offered by Everett F. Harrison, ed., *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985): "These two sources combine to set forth one common apostolic gospel. In briefest outline, this message contained: 1) A historical proclamation of the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus, set forth as the fulfillment of prophecy and involving man's responsibility; 2) A theological evaluation of the person of Jesus as both Lord and Christ; 3) A summons to repent and receive the forgiveness of sins."

postmodern⁸ context? Is it a case of either/or, or are there alternative ways of sharing the gospel that are effective in the emerging culture?

Evangelism during the modern period has prominent characteristics. In *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture*, Shane Hipps provides a helpful diagram, metaphor, and discussion of how knowledge is acquired in the modern era that clarifies the form and formula of modern evangelism.⁹ Hipps describes the modern era approach of Christian thought and practice in figure 2.

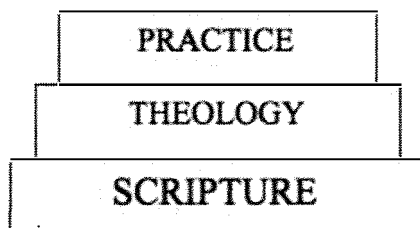


Figure 2. How knowledge is acquired in the modern era

The modern approach to knowledge, known as foundationalism, developed during the Enlightenment and asserts that all truth is derived from a single foundation. Knowledge is added on top of this foundation, and knowledge builds in one direction, from the foundation to the top floor: scripture to theology to practice. It is a one-way, linear, sequential metaphor in which the foundation determines everything above it. Following Hipps' model, Scripture and the propositions developed from it provide the foundation of evangelism in the modern era. Everything else develops from this base.

⁸ Throughout the rest of this paper, the terms "postmodern" and "emerging culture" will be used interchangeably.

⁹ Shane Hipps, *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture: How Media Shapes Faith, the Gospel, and Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 69.

In his book *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, George Hunter distinguishes between the Celtic way of evangelism and the Roman model.¹⁰ He writes that the Roman model has three phases: 1) Present the Christian message; 2) Invite them to decide to believe in Christ and become Christians; and 3) if they decide positively, welcome them into the church and its fellowship. Hunter writes, “The Roman model seems very logical to us because most American evangelicals are scripted by it! We explain the gospel, they accept Christ, then we welcome them into the church! Presentation. Decision. Assimilation. What could be more logical than that?”¹¹ Hunter’s words point to some important characteristics of modern evangelism. Its emphasis is on left brain linear, informational activity and can be summed up in the following categories: propositional, exclusive, centered on individualism, and attractional.

In modern evangelism, the gospel is propositional in nature and is presented in a formulaic fashion. God created humans perfect and sinless. Humans sinned, and the wages of sin is death. Jesus came and lived a sinless life (that humans could not live) and died in their place (what should have happened to them). He rose from the dead and now humans can have eternal life. To receive eternal life, they must confess and repent of their sins and accept his Lordship of their lives. If they do this, they are converted and enter the church. It is logical and sequential. It is verifiable because, more often than not,

¹⁰ George G. Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West Again* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2000), 53.

¹¹ Ibid.

converts can pinpoint the moment of conversion. Propositional theology is of primary importance in this linear process.

In addition to its propositional nature, modern evangelism is exclusive. If a person hears the propositional presentation and accepts it the individual is “in” and can join the Christian community. If the person rejects it, he/she is “out.” There is an easily discernable line of demarcation between Christians and those who are not. In the modern view, evangelism is viewed as a salvific process focused on the individual who is presented with the doctrinal truth. The individual makes the decision, after weighing the evidence, as to whether to accept or reject the gospel. The individual follows the prescribed pathway of conversion.

A preferred method for modern evangelizing is attractional and involves the traditional methodology of an evangelistic crusade. Periodically, church members plan to reach the community. They schedule a professional evangelist to hold meetings, and they advertise the meetings by various methods: newspapers, billboards, advertisements, flyers, door-to-door, and word of mouth. The meetings are held for a prescribed period of time sufficient to cover the propositional points of the host church. The evangelist preaches persuasively on these points, and attendees are given an opportunity (or many opportunities) to follow the conversion formula and accept the propositional points. If they accept, they are ushered into church membership and ushered out of the world.

At this point, the campaign is completed, evangelism is accomplished, the gospel has been shared, and all go back to normal until the next outreach round is scheduled. In

Reimagining Evangelism, Rick Richardson describes this method of outreach as the “Close the Deal” form of evangelism:

The paradigm that dominated much twentieth-century evangelism might be called “Evangelism as Closing the Deal on a Sales Call.” Many Christians think they have to dump their content on someone and then close the deal, or else they haven’t really shared their faith. This basic paradigm of evangelism as individuals seeking to make the close on a sales call permeates the evangelical consciousness. Our image of the evangelist is the image of a spiritual salesman.¹²

Modern evangelism has been effective because millions around the world have been converted and given their lives and allegiance to Christ and his Kingdom. Modern evangelism has focused on and highlighted the primacy of Scripture as a definer of truth and a guide for the life of an individual and the church community. However, modern evangelism in its praxis has some inherent issues. Hipps writes:

When we claim the gospel message is unchanging, we risk boasting of a kind of omniscience in which we presume to know the totality of God’s inexhaustible mysteries. We presume to have discovered the one simple and unchanging message for all times and places. In this view, the Holy Spirit, who was sent to teach us truth, becomes little more than a dashboard ornament, for we already know all the truth we need. In this view, the gospel story (if there is one) is of no consequence; all that matters is static proposition.¹³

In the modern era, learning, understanding, and accepting truth was enough. The problem is that times have changed and the postmodern era has begun. The new era raises new questions: Is the gospel understanding and the evangelistic praxis of the modern era effective and sufficient for the needs of the postmodern era? If not, what are those needs and how can Christians proficiently address the gospel to the emerging culture? The

¹² Rick Richardson, *Reimagining Evangelism: Inviting Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 17.

¹³ Hipps, *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture*, 90.

author of this paper believes modern evangelical approaches are not effective among people influenced by postmodernism.

This is a transition period. The contemporary world and current society are on the cusp the modern era's transition to the postmodern era. The scope and character of the transition from the modern to the postmodern paradigm are discussed and studied, and the culture is transitioning and forces transformations in all aspects of life. This transitory state of affairs is also evident in evangelism, and Rick Richardson writes about this in *Evangelism Outside the Box* and encapsulates the elements into three key transformations:

First, people today are looking for truth that is experiential, for communities in which faith is lived out and for spiritual experiences that are tangible and real. *So experience comes before explanation.*

Second, people today are looking for a safe and accepting community in which to work out their identity. *So belonging comes before believing.*

Third, the battle for allegiance today is a battle for people's spiritual and moral imagination. *So image comes before word.*¹⁴

Richardson describes a profound change in the way people in the emerging culture think, feel, and process. There has been a monumental shift from left brained dominance to right brained dominance, from linear dynamics to the conceptual and intuitive. Members of society also developed a great hunger for depth in interpersonal relationships and the building and establishing of community. Advances in technology, such as the internet and other communication techniques, connect the world citizens as

¹⁴ Rick Richardson, *Evangelism Outside the Box: New Ways to Help People Experience the Good News* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 51-52.

never before. Individuals can converse instantaneously in several mediums at the same time; yet, in spite of this connectedness many people feel lonely and isolated. Society lost community, knowing neighbors is a thing of the past, and people are disconnected.

Leonard Sweet observes in *The Gospel According to Starbucks*:

When compared to as recently as the 1980's, US Americans have fewer relationships and less intimate friendships outside the family than they used to. That's one reason family members are becoming more important, and outside friends less so. That's also the big reason for the burgeoning relationship industries of counselors, coaches, therapists, trainers . . . a flotilla of "paid" friends.¹⁵

The extent of personal isolation is underscored by the phrase "paid friends."

The fuel of modern era, traditional, propositional evangelism is unlit because there is no oxygen of community and relationship to breath life into it. There was a communal aspect to modern evangelism, but it was tangential and not intentional, and it piggy-backed on the societal community of the day. There were still neighborhoods, and people lived most, if not all, of their lives in the same home. They started families, raised their children and retired in the same neighborhood, and there was continuity and community that carried over into the neighborhood church. Sweet writes, "Churches doubled as community centers, town meeting halls, centers for disseminating news, places of community celebrations and bases of operation during times of emergency . . . but for the most part, the church has lost its reputation for supporting and building the community"¹⁶ The communal aspect of modern era churches was a byproduct, not a

¹⁵ Leonard I. Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2007), 144.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 142.

focused effort, and community was weakened by the transformation to the emerging culture. Promulgation of propositional truth remained. Sweet continues, "But the church has divested itself of the connection business in order to master the principle business, the proposition business, and the being-right business. Its school of thought is now a school of ought. The church is by and large no longer in the relationship business."¹⁷

The results are important and staggering. Church membership declines, and church attendance dissipates. George Barna estimates that only 8 to 12 percent of the population of the United States of America is involved in church.¹⁸ There needs to be a breath of new life to light the fuel again. The church needs oxygen, and Barna writes:

The postmodern approach to knowledge, known as the *web of belief*, was developed by Willard V. Quine in 1970. In this conception, knowledge is conditioned both by our experience and by truth claims. These truth claims have multiple interconnections with each other. They form a web bound by, but not rooted in, experience. There is no foundation; instead, the legitimacy of a web is determined by its coherence. More interconnections mean a more coherent belief system. It is a *two-way* dialogue in which experience shapes belief and belief shapes experience.¹⁹

In the modern era belief is individual and primary; in the postmodern era "experience shapes belief and belief shapes experience." This insight informs evangelistic efforts in the emerging culture and suggests its parameters in comparison with the modern era. For the sake of clarity and conciseness in making comparisons

¹⁷ Ibid., 144.

¹⁸ George Barna, Off The Map Conference, Seattle, WA, November 3-4, 2006.

¹⁹ Ibid., 69.

between modern and postmodern society, I will employ Rick Richardson's subheadings.²⁰

Collaboration Versus Activism

Faith is propositional in the modern church. What matters above all is right orthodoxy, a right understanding of Scripture that is best embodied by systematic theology. Salvation becomes equational, but this does not mean that orthodoxy or propositions are right or wrong. The point is that the modern church reflects its era and society based on the primacy of science, reason, and empirical study. The systemization of theology and its primacy reflects a cultural reality where knowledge takes precedence over feelings. In this view, logic and rationality are dependable, repeatable, and trustworthy, but feelings are mercurial and not dependable. In the modern era paradigm, worship takes on a didactic tenor, and the music and hymns are propositionally focused.

Activism is a type of outreach described in this chapter as a traditional evangelistic crusade pattern that followed a go, conquer, and retrieve mentality. Collaboration, on the other hand, refers to the community of Christ engaged in partnership with God that seeks where He works and collaborates with Him. It thrives in the natural flow of life, relationships, and interactions with others. It focuses on living out a love relationship with God through spontaneous love relationships with others.

²⁰ Richardson, *Reimagining Evangelism*, 26-27. I will be using his subheadings and including my own wording and interpretations of what they delineate.

Richardson writes, “Evangelism could become an adventure in detection rather than a burden of making it all happen.”²¹

Rationality was the mantra of the moderns; postmoderns seek the experiential. Sweet, McLaren, and Haselmayer write, “Postmoderns define the meaning of life in terms of the integrity of relationships and the intensity of experiences. For them, intensity, not clarity, is the dominant concern.”²² The emerging church is more experiential in nature, but some people suggest the emerging church is not about substance. This is inaccurate. The emerging church is concerned about orthodoxy, but orthodoxy that is discernable through teaching, relationships, and experiential faith. Peter Rollins discusses these issues in *How (Not) to Speak of God*:

Theology could be provisionally described as that which attempts to come to grips with this life-giving experience, to describe the source from which everything is suspended and from which our faith is born. In faith God is experienced as the absolute subject who grasps us, while in theology we set about reflecting upon this subject. Here the source of our desire is rendered into an (intellectual) object that we may reflect upon. In faith we are held, in theology we hold.²³

Community Versus Individual

In the modernist evangelistic era, the church focused on individuals and their interactions and responses to the gospel presented through evangelistic campaigns. The statement, “Don’t look at the church. Look at Jesus,” was often used by pastors. This statement directs the focus of an unchurched person away from the faults and foibles of

²¹ Ibid., 27.

²² Sweet, McLaren, and Haselmayer, “A” *Is for Abductive*, 120.

²³ Peter Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete, 2006), 1-2.

the local church community toward the perfection and person of Jesus. The unspoken message was that what happened in the church among its members does not matter. What matters is Jesus and a personal relationship with Him. The statement is both true and false. It is true in the sense that salvation only comes through Christ, and he is the model and example. It is false because Christ commanded the gospel be lived out and shared in the context of his kingdom community, the Church. The community is the focus of the emerging culture because reality, authority, and validity are experienced in community. Richardson writes that postmoderns want to belong and seek community:

People come to Christ primarily in the context of community. Belonging comes before believing. Evangelism is about helping people belong so that they can come to believe. So our communities need to be places where people can connect before they have to commit.²⁴

Individualism is a central concern in modernism, and it shifted away from communal concepts to the individual. The focus was on personal rights, designs, and the pursuit of happiness. This modernistic focus invaded the church, and salvation became an individualistic affair focused on a personal, right relationship with God. The concern was on how God interacts with persons individually. Praxis is about how to live life, and prayer focused on how God can help and satisfy personal needs.

The emerging church does not negate the individual; rather, the emerging church adheres to *ubuntu*. There are many possible translations in English for *ubuntu*, including: “Humanity towards others. I am because we are. A person ‘becomes human’ through other persons. A person is a person because of other persons. The belief in a universal

²⁴ Ibid., 27.

bond of sharing that connects all humanity.” Archbishop Desmond Tutu defined the concept:

A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed.²⁵

The gospel emphasizes the formation of a community of believers who live life based on Christ’s life and teachings, and this concept of community addresses the postmodern condition. Paul Wilkes describes the postmodern condition:

These are children of divorce, many of whom have no church background. They are wary, mistrustful of institutions that have disappointed us all. They are fragmented. Skeptical of certainty. Life is terribly fragile and unpredictable. They long for deep relationships. They relate to individuals, to people, not some idea or ideal or institutional line. They want to see continuity, where they fit in in this confusing time . . . They process truth relationally, so if they see that a community really does stand for something and will be there for them when things are going great and when they suck, then they’ll commit to it.²⁶

Friendship Versus Agenda

In the modernist paradigm of evangelism, an unchurched person is a hunting trophy to be bagged, and the goal is to bag as many trophies as possible. The process is to give the message, make the pitch, and seal the deal. In the emerging culture friendship is key to conversion, and friendship stems from a genuine desire for relationship without mixed motives or hidden agendas. Brian McLaren writes: “Good evangelism is the

²⁵ *Wikipedia*, “Ubuntu,” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubuntu_\(ideology\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubuntu_(ideology)) (September 19, 2008).

²⁶ Paul Wilkes, “Warehouse 242,” *Christian Century* 118, no. 11 (2001): 12.

process of being friendly without discrimination and influencing all of one's friends toward better living, through good deeds and good conversations."²⁷

Story Versus Dogma

Most individuals do not live and breathe dogma; instead, they live their lives through a series of experiences, and each experience is a story within the meta-story of life. The story intertwines with the stories of others like the ever expanding ripples radiating from a raindrop in a pond. Members of the emerging culture are not swayed by propositions; Sweet writes that they are moved by stories and experiences:

Living in one's head is no longer a deep life but a shallow life. The hunger of the soul is for living in ones' heart as much as living in one's head. People don't want staged experiences; they hunger (and thirst) for the spontaneity of authentic experience in this time of transition. Mass-produced and prefabricated don't cut it. We're looking for authentic experiences of the moment.²⁸

Members of the emerging culture search for an experiential reality of God. They want to know His truths through interaction with others, and they want to know the story and how they become part of it.

Good News about God's Kingdom Versus Good News about the Afterlife

In the modernist evangelistic era, the message was based on individual lostness, how to get out of the predicament through conversion, and how to persevere until Christ's Second Coming when Christ's Kingdom would be established. "Pie in the sky

²⁷ Brian D. McLaren, *More Ready Than You Realize: Evangelism as Dance in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids, MI. Zondervan, 2002), 15.

²⁸ Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks*, 37.

by-and-by” was the proverbial carrot attached to the stick, but that was a truncated part of Christ’s message.

Jesus declared that the kingdom of heaven was at hand and established through his incarnation. Paul believed Jesus came to establish a community that would embody Jesus’ life, message, and sacrifice (2 Cor. 5:19-20). The community would spread his Kingdom on earth, albeit partially, with its ultimate realization at his return at the end of the age. The establishment of the kingdom was demonstrated by its citizens who drew people into an intimate relationship with God (Matt. 28:16-20), addressed the inequities and injustices of the world (Matt. 25:31-46), made a difference in their societies, and were the “salt” and “light” of Jesus’ parables (Matt. 5:13-14). This is the new paradigm of the postmodern.

Journey Versus Event

Conversion drew lines of demarcation in modern era evangelism. Conversion claims were divining rods that enabled the church to determine who was saved and who was not, and who was in and who was out. Postmodern evangelism conversion is not an event; it is a process. Richardson writes:

The new model, a model based on the image of journey, sees all of us as moving either toward the goal or away from the goal. If the goal is to be a wholehearted follower of Jesus, then we are at different points along the way. But the crucial question is whether we are moving toward the center and beginning to follow in the footsteps of the Leader.²⁹

²⁹ Richardson, *Reimagining Evangelism*, 29.

Richardson alludes to a substantial shift in the concept of conversion. Rather than it being a one time event that converts look back on as an anchor point or launch pad, there are several conversions throughout an individual's lifetime. Believers' relationships and experiences with God include shifts and movement closer to and farther away from Him and constant realignment toward His goal. Richardson sums this up: "If regular folks like us are filled with the Spirit and led by the Spirit and pursue conversations with spiritual companions, we may be used by God to change the face of the church and contribute much toward the redemption of people and the transformation of society."³⁰

Exclusive Versus Inclusive

When the author of this paper was growing up in his hometown church, I remember the phraseology that pastors and teachers used when they made reference to individuals who were not Christians. The term of reference was "the world." So the dichotomy of "us" versus "the world" was firmly embedded in my mind. I asked what made us "us" and them "the world." Their answer was something like: "Well, because we have the truth!" The unspoken message was that we were the in group and the world was suspect and dangerous. Another unspoken message, and to me the worst, was that we were somehow superior to everyone else. The modernist church may be plagued with exclusiveness based on members having the correct knowledge.

My early experience on the modernist tradition raised another question. I saw that many truly good things were done and spoken by those outside the church. I asked how

³⁰ Ibid., 19.

those who did not have the truth lived and spoke the truth when we were supposed to be the only ones who had the truth. The answer was, "That's easy! It really isn't the truth! It is truth mixed with error and that's the most insidious kind!" this exclusivity suggested the modernist church is the repository of all things good and true from God.

The emerging church proposes the alternate pathway of inclusion, and proponents of this pathway assert that all that is good comes from God. When anything good happens in the world, it is through God's influence or intervention, and believers can embrace and participate in the good. The pathway of Christ is inclusive. Paul emphasized the inclusivity concept when he wrote: "There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28), and the writer of John announced, "For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Attractional Versus Missional/Relational/Incarnational

The modernist church's growth mode is attractional, as previously discussed, and the "us" versus "them" approach undergirds this concept of evangelism and outreach. Evangelistic outreach efforts, programs for the community, a seeker service, and evangelistic campaigns are designed to "attract" unchurched people. The goal is to involve them in a process of behaving and thinking like members of the church that does the outreach. Alan Hirsch describes this psychology and behavior:

We have tended to see mission as something we do in "heathen nations" and not on home base . . . So while the local church genuinely does forms of evangelism and outreach, because it measures effectiveness through numerical growth, better programming, and increase of plant and resources, it requires the attractional

impulse to support it. The exchange is subtle but profound, and the net effect is to unwittingly block the outward-bound movement that is built into the gospel.³¹

The definitions of three words clarify the emerging church's understanding of Christ's community: missional, relational, and incarnational. First, missional refers to "a community of God's people that defines itself, and organizes its life around, its real purpose of being an agent of God's mission to the world."³² The purpose of the church is to implement the *Missio Dei*, which is outwardly focused. Jesus referred to this when he described his followers as "light" and "salt" that can fulfill their purpose when they are diffused in darkness or food. Jesus' intent for his community of believers is missional: "But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Second, Christ's community of believers is relational. The emerging church helps build relationships with people through genuine love and concern for them versus seeking converts. George Barna asserts in *Revolution*:

The new Revolution differs in that its primary impetus is not salvation among the unrepentant but the personal renewal and recommitment of believers. The dominant catalyst is people's desperation for a genuine relationship with God. The renewal of that relationship spurs believers to participate in spreading the gospel.³³

³¹ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2006), 130.

³² Ibid., 82.

³³ George Barna, *Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2005), 103.

Third, incarnational is one of the great features of the gospel: God became flesh (John 1:14). The incarnation demonstrated God's desire that humans become one with Him again in all of its relational connotations. Jesus declared in response to Philip's request to see the Father: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). In John 17:22, Jesus says that his goal for believers is to "be one as We are one." He wants his followers to be in connected relationships emulating Jesus' connection with his father.

Peter Rollins writes, "To love is to know God precisely because God is love. The emerging community, at its best, can teach us again that love must be the first word on our lips and also the last, and that we must seek to incarnate that sacred word in the world."³⁴ The fuel of Scripture and the oxygen of community and relationship were described earlier in this chapter. These absolutely essential components do not produce fire until exposed to heat. The emerging church and the Spirit provide the essential spark.

Modern era evangelists promulgate Scripture and propositions. Postmodern evangelists proffer community and relationship. It is not, however, a question of either or because, using the brain structure analogy, a combination of the left and right brain maximizes the infinite possibilities of a brain united. John declared that Jesus is "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). The Word is the scriptural truth, the revelation of Christ, and the gospel, which is the fuel. The flesh is Christ who lived on earth in relationship with humanity and established the parameters of his Kingdom community, which is oxygen. John wrote that Jesus came and "dwelt among us" (John

³⁴ Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*. 3.

1:14), which is the heat. The combination is flammable, but the Word alone can produce a sterile intellectual assent to the gospel with no flame, fire, or heat.

On the other hand, if the primary focus is believers' interactions in community, the result may be a community without structure, boundaries, guidance, and purpose. A gospel community must include the gospel. The Word and flesh have no kingdom life without the dwelling which is the heat that creates combustion. The scriptural basis for this statement is the story of Pentecost. Christ rose from the dead and ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9-11), and the community of believers waited in an upper room for the realization of Jesus' last words: "But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:6-7). Suddenly, the Holy Spirit descended upon them: "Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:3-4).

The Pentecostal experience demonstrates that when the "fuel" of the truth of Scripture touched the "hearts" of the community of believers and they received the "oxygen" of their realization and the "heat" of the Holy Spirit, this experience of Christ's Kingdom bursts into the "flame" of realization and reality. The result was an empowered gospel community intimately connected to God through experience and His Word, which guided and sustained them. They are intimately connected with God and one another, and they experienced life together. They join their individual stories into community stories that form chapters in God's story. Richardson writes:

People today understand that “story” is a more fundamental category than “proposition” though both are needed. Sometimes Christians’ focus on dogma instead of story has resulted in divorcing our truth from the story that gives our truth its meaning, plausibility and power. We must recover our own stories, and God’s Big Story, and connect them to the stories of people we love and are reaching out to. Our story. God’s story. Their story.³⁵

The Kingdom of Christ Is a Cross-cultural Community

The *Missio Dei* is realized in the Kingdom community that John the Baptist announced Jesus came to establish (Matt. 3:1-3), and Jesus’ vision of the content of the community is breathtaking:

Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matt. 28:18-20)

This passage is called The Great Commission, and it conveys Jesus’ range of inclusiveness and the diversity of his Kingdom’s citizenry.

Jesus demonstrated his inclusiveness in the Gospel narratives through his involvement with diverse people including: Samaritans and Romans, people of all social groups, rich and poor, and both genders who participated in the establishment of His Kingdom. Jesus practiced what he preached throughout his ministry often to the disdain and chagrin of his disciples, the religious leaders, and the society of his day. Paul write about inclusivity,

For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all

³⁵ Richardson, *Reimagining Evangelism*, 87.

one in Christ Jesus. And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you. (Gal. 3:26-29)

Prior to Jesus' establishment of his Kingdom, all other kingdoms were determined by race, ethnicity, culture, and clan. These kingdoms' physical boundaries were determined by political prowess and military might, and in some instances, monetary muscle. The Kingdom of Heaven is radically different because it rejects all boundaries, transcends all ethnic, racial, and national distinctions, and flourishes in diversity and inclusiveness.

Through the cross, the Gospel language embraces diversity and is the communal glue of the Kingdom of Heaven. God's "universal language of love" becomes the lingua franca of His people, and His kingdom is built of "living stones" (1 Pet. 2:4-5) made a reality through the gift of His Son and the vivifying power of His Spirit. Jesus made no secret of his aspirations for his followers and his Kingdom.

Jesus wants inclusiveness in his Kingdom. He embraces diversity, and he calls for transcendence of the dividing walls of race, ethnicity, culture, socio-economic biases, and gender discrimination. Christ's imperative is clear, and in this world of increasing tribal fragmentation, believers must communicate Christ's Kingdom dynamics in a coherent manner. They can establish connectedness and develop community.

Believers must understand that the globalization concept is transformational for Christ's Kingdom among diverse, global cultures. Globalization is the worldwide integration of economic, cultural, political, religious, and social systems, and few people live in a community of physical and cultural isolation. Believers live in a global

community of interconnectedness and, as the community of Christ, they can embrace this new reality and opportunity. This viewpoint is illustrated by Bob Robertson, Jr. in

Glocalization:

Globalization is not the result of technology and development that and is emerging, but the end result of God's plan for the world and nations all along. This is not a test. This is not a phase. This is the ultimate connectedness that God has planned for the world since the first day of creation. Technology and development are only the means that God established long ago to connect us because it is a *glocal* faith.³⁶

Humanity lives in a world and emerging culture that are inter-neighborhood, inter-workplace, inter-school, inter-everywhere. Changes have engulfed the planet, and the world is flat as Thomas L. Friedman describes in *The World Is Flat*:

[Flat] means equalizing, because the flattening forces are empowering more and more individuals today to reach farther, faster, deeper, and cheaper than ever before, and that is equalizing power—and equalizing opportunity, by giving so many more people the tools and ability to connect, compete, and collaborate.³⁷

To transform cultures and people, emerging church believers must enter their communities and understand the communities' paradigms and stories. An understanding of glocalization facilitates this transformational mission:

Glocalization (or glocalisation) is a portmanteau of *globalization* and *localization*. By definition, the term "glocal" refers to the individual, group, division, unit, organization, and community which is willing and is able to "think globally and act locally." The term has been used to show the human capacity to bridge scales (from local to global) and to help overcome meso-scale, bounded, "little-box" thinking.³⁸

³⁶ Bob Roberts, *Glocalization: How Followers of Jesus Engage the New Flat World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 25.

³⁷ Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007).

³⁸ *Wikipedia*, "Glocalization," <http://www.reference.com/browse/wiki/Glocalisation> (accessed: December 3, 2007).

The reality is that the “we” culture and the “them” cultures are not divisible from each other. To interface believers must embrace who we are, how we experience things, what our stories are, and how those stories determine us. J. Edward Chamberlin writes in *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories*:

Other people’s stories are as varied as the landscapes and languages of the world; and the storytelling traditions to which they belong tell the different truths of religion and science, of history and the arts. They tell people where they came from, and why they are here; how to live, and sometimes how to die . . . What we share is the practice of believing, which we become adept at very early in our lives and it is this practice that generates the power of stories.³⁹

The Gospel is the truth that defines and directs Christians, and the Gospel is story. It is the story of God who incarnated in the world and human life, and shared His story of redemption and reality with humanity. His followers are called to share that story among the varied stories of all nations. Neil Cole describes this process in his book, *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens*:

After [Jesus’] death, burial, resurrection, ascension to heaven, and finally Pentecost, where do people need to go to be in the presence of Almighty God? Wherever His people are, they are in the presence of the Holy God . . . Now the Kingdom of God can enter into every neighborhood and every nation *simultaneously*.⁴⁰

Christians can share God’s story and their stories by embracing the diversity of surrounding culture with a love that reflects Christ’s love. That love inspires and compels Christians to build relationships, but to build strong and vibrant relationships they must communicate in a manner that is recognized, understood, and embraced by all.

³⁹ J. Edward Chamberlin, *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2003), 1-2.

⁴⁰ Neil Cole, *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 44.

Cross-Cultural Communication

In *Embracing Diversity*, Leslie N. Pollard quotes Gottfried Oosterwal about cross-cultural communication:

It is important to stress here that cultural differences are not shaped by biophysical factors such as race or color of the skin, nor are they external and material, such as the way people dress or eat or walk or behave. They are rooted in differences in values, in people's basic cultural assumptions, in the way they perceive reality, and in their views of what is right or wrong, good or bad, ideal and desirable. These constitute the layers that shape the dynamics of the process of communication between *sender* and *recipient* and, in addition to the layers of age and gender, etc., are responsible for the misunderstandings and distortions and misinterpretations that are characteristics of all cross-cultural communication.⁴¹

Robert J. Priest and Alvard L. Nieves describe how certain behaviors are necessary for competency in a cross-cultural interface:

[B]ecoming more culturally competent begins with the ability to describe and analyze one's ethnic identity, and develops into an awareness of how culture influences the attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of self and others. It includes the ability to understand how differences help or hinder social interactions and social relations. Finally, cultural competence requires the skills and metaskills necessary to resolve conflicts, make decisions, and function in novel cultural and interpersonal situations.⁴²

Cross-cultural competency requires comprehension and understanding of cultures, a commitment to relationship development and what it takes to build those relationships, and effective communication.

⁴¹ Leslie N. Pollard, *Embracing Diversity: How to Understand and Reach People of All Cultures* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 22.

⁴² Robert J. Priest and Alvaro L. Nieves, *This Side of Heaven: Race, Ethnicity, and Christian Faith* (New York: Oxford University, 2007), 90.

Oosterwal delineates five principles of cross-cultural communication and their implementation:⁴³

1. *Words do not have meaning by themselves; words derive their meaning from people's underlying cultural assumptions, values, and perceptions.* To effectively communicate impels us to take time to build cross-cultural relationships and learn of the life values and cultural ideologies of that culture. It calls for a revisioning of life together reflected through the other's eyes and experiences.
2. *Consider not only the content of the message, but also its context.* Anthropologists make a helpful distinction between "high-context cultures" and "low-context cultures". We Americans are predominantly a low-context culture. Communication is direct and to the point. We tend to use few words. "Communication in high-context cultures is through an often-artistic flow of words and a lot of "loopings" and "detours". It is through concrete examples, rather than by the use of abstract terms; it is through stories and parables."⁴⁴
3. *Every culture has its own mode of communication.* We need to be aware of what context the people of the culture we are trying to communicate with are in—high context or low. And, most importantly, we are not to impose our own culturally defined mode of communication as being superior. Communication requires connection and connection requires respect and reciprocation.
4. *Always keep in mind the true purpose of communication.* Our purpose as the Kingdom community of Christ is to establish relationships, bring about reconciliation and create a bond and a body of Christ.
5. *There is no communication without identification.* "What that means, in practice, is that in order for a message—or *the message*—to be clearly understood and accepted, the sender must identify with the recipients, become one with them in the setting of their particular culture, empathize with them, declare himself or herself in solidarity with them."⁴⁵

The writer of John relates how Jesus announced a vision for His Kingdom that Jesus gave his disciples before his trial and crucifixion:

⁴³ Pollard, *Embracing Diversity*, 24-30.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

Just as you [Father] sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world. And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth. I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. (John 17:18-21)

This theocentric oneness requires more than what ethnorelativistic ideals offer; it requires a Spirit-empowered Christocentric life.⁴⁶

Darrell L. Guder calls a Christocentric group “the community of communities.”

In reference to John 17:18-21, he makes these observations:

[This passage] teaches us that the missional connectedness of the church is not merely a matter of institutional unity, and even less of efficiency, stewardship, good public relations, or effective growth strategies. The oneness spoken of here is a matter of obedience to the Lord of the church, obedience that centers on his mission, “so that the world may know that you have sent me.” The basic missional task of connecting structures, then, is to witness to the one gospel that relates all Christians to one another under their one Lord and sends the church into the world, “to the ends of the earth.”⁴⁷

Christ expects Christians to portray his likeness, love, and desire for others. When they become like him, cross-cultural communication reaches its apex purpose: to incarnate

Christ to the world. Pollard opines:

In the end, though, God chose the way of *identification*: He became as one of us: poor with the poor, an Asian with the Asians. He took upon Himself our existence, our culture. The Incarnation is the basis of all effective cross-cultural communication: becoming one with the people, taking on their cultural ways for the express purpose of establishing a new relationship with God, a new fellowship, a new communion. This is the purpose of all cross-cultural communication.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Ibid., 17-18.

⁴⁷ Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church to North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 250.

⁴⁸ Pollard, *Embracing Diversity*, 31.

Cross-cultural has a deeper meaning for the followers of Jesus. That deeper meaning is that all Christian cross-cultural interaction is transformed into a new cultural oneness and inclusiveness through the cross of Christ. This may be missing in contemporary Christianity. At its beginnings, Christianity crossed over barriers and boundaries of nationality, race and culture, and formed a universal body, but Christianity today seems exclusive and separate. Sweet writes:

I take that word “cross-cultural” literally. In fact, I use that word “cross-cultural” where others use the word “counter-cultural,” a word which I NEVER use since it is so anti-incarnational. We aren’t to “counter” other cultures. That’s so not what the incarnation is about. We are in the business of “crossing” every culture—of the laying down and lifting up of the “cross” in every culture—hence “cross-cultural.” Notice the symbol of the cross is a uniting of opposites . . . the vertical ONE and the horizontal MANY.⁴⁹

Christians are called to embody Christ to the cultures around them, and to do so they must become cross-cultural and Cross-cultural. As a result, they discover modalities of effective communication and dialog, develop connections and relationships, and form communally consistent outcomes. All become one.

Creating Spaces for the Community of Christ

Christ’s dream for his kingdom cannot become reality without a vital and vibrant community of relationally involved individuals focused on Jesus. Propositional profundity is not the determining factor. A community formed around and centered on the incarnation of the *Imago Dei* is a community of Jesus followers and the community relates to people in despair. Henri Nouwen describes contemporary society’s condition:

⁴⁹ Leonard Sweet, chat room discussion with George Fox University doctoral cohort, December 4, 2007.

Beneath all the great accomplishments of our time, there is a deep current of despair. While efficiency and control are the great aspirations of our society, the loneliness, isolation, lack of friendship and intimacy, broken relationships, boredom, feelings of emptiness and depression, and a deep sense of uselessness fill the hearts of millions of people in our success-oriented world.⁵⁰

The development of community is central and crucial to establish the *Missio Dei*, and that understanding raises several questions: How is Christ incarnated into a community? What are the dynamics that develop such a community? How is the community sustained? Is it correct to state that the creation of community is crucial to the heart of God and that Christ incarnates himself in the midst of such a community?

Before the creation of humanity, the writer of Genesis reveals that God had a specific vision of human community: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, to be like ourselves' . . . So God created man in his own image; God patterned them after himself; male and female he created them . . . And the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a companion who will help him'" (Gen. 1:26-27; 2:18).

These passages present the Trinity as a community of love. Grenz describes this community in *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living*:

Active, self-giving love builds the unity within the one God. The unity of God is nothing less than each of the Trinitarian persons giving himself to the others. This unity is the dedication of each to the others. Through all eternity the Father loves the Son, and the Son reciprocates that love. This love is the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of the relationship of the Father and the Son. Through all eternity, therefore, God is the social Trinity, the community of love.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroad, 1989).

⁵¹ Stanley J. Grenz, *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 47.

Jesus describes God's desire to have humanity reflect the intimate interconnectedness of the triune community:

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples . . . All those who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come to them, and live with them. (John 13:34-35, 14:23)

John continues this train of thought:

All who proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God. We know how much God loves us, and we put our trust in him. God is love, and all who live in love live in God and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect . . . because we are like Christ here in this world. (1 John 4:15-17)

These scriptural passages describe the Father's desire to incarnate Christ in community, and Jesus intends that Christians will embody him in the world through community. Grenz writes,

Because God is a plurality-in-unity, the ideal for humankind does not focus on solitary persons, but on persons-in-community. God intends that we reflect the divine nature in our lives. This is only possible as we move out of our isolation and into godly relationships with others. Consequently, true Christian living is life-in-relationship or life-in-community.⁵²

Paul emphasizes these concepts of intimate interrelationship and incarnation in his illustration of Christ's body and the work of reconciliation:

The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up only one body. So it is with the body of Christ . . . we have all been baptized into Christ's body by one Spirit, and we have all received the same Spirit . . . Now all of you together are Christ's body, and each one of you is a separate and necessary part of it. (1 Cor. 12:12-13, 27)

⁵² Ibid., 51.

Paul points out that, although all persons are unique individuals, they cannot function in the capacity God intends unless individuality is connected corporately in the body of Christ. Humanity is a system that brings love to life, which is the core of Christ's kingdom. Love finds its fulfillment and realization in relationship as Paul writes:

This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" (2 Cor. 5:17-20)

The concept of reconciliation requires the reestablishment of relationships that are disconnected and distanced. Through the interconnectedness of a Christ-community, Jesus continues the work of reconciliation that God launched through His incarnation. A reconciling community must be relational, and to be relational, the community must know and interact with the surrounding culture and society. The interaction is as subjective and objective participants, not as observers. Brenda Salter McNeil emphasizes this point in her book, *A Credible Witness: Reflections on Power, Evangelism and Race*:

[W]e must engage [people] with a spiritual ear for the deeper thirst and understanding of the context of their well.⁵³ Rather than telling non-Christians what to do or participating in theological, social or political debates, how about offering them something so intriguing that they will want to know more and begin to ask questions? This would require us to know enough of their culture, social conditions and religious ideas to get beyond some superficial conversations. This

⁵³ In reference to a well, McNeil uses the story of Jesus and his interaction with the Samaritan women at Jacob's well as the framework for the development of her discussions about racial and cultural reconciliation by the Christian community that implements Christ's methodologies. The well is a metaphor for their life circumstances and environment.

insight will enable us not to be distracted but to be knowledgeable about their terrain.⁵⁴

Evangelism moves from a focus on increased membership housed in an ever-expanding physical plant to a community of believers who expand their interaction with society in increasingly intertwined relationships based on care, concern, and love. Love compels the community into action as N.T. Wright writes:

When the church is seen to move straight from worship of God to affecting much-needed change in the world; when it becomes clear that the people who feast at Jesus' table are the ones at the forefront of work to eliminate hunger and famine; when people realize that those who pray for the Spirit to work in and through them are the people who seem to have extra resources of love and patience in caring for those whose lives are damaged, bruised, and shamed—then it is natural for people to recognize that something is going on that they want to be a part of.⁵⁵

Christ is the nucleus of his community. The Holy Spirit is the fire that ignites the community and unleashes the power of love that warms and attracts people to the community and Christ. It forms a circle of friends.

Families are fragmented and reconfigured. People move constantly from one locality to another, one job to another, and one career to another. Knowledge is everywhere and easily at their fingertips, but community is rare and elusive. People want to be needed, crave friendship and love, and people want to be valued. People want desperately to be a part of a community and long for an authentic experience in their daily lives. What people need is to see and experience God's heart of love lived out through the love and lives of Jesus' followers. Jim Henderson echoes these thoughts:

⁵⁴ Brenda Salter McNeil, *A Credible Witness: Reflections on Power, Evangelism, and Race* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 94.

⁵⁵ N.T. Wright, "Heaven Is Not Our Home," *Christianity Today*, April 2008, 36-39.

If being Christians meant we were the most *real* people on earth rather than the most religious, evangelism as a program would disappear forever. Why? Simply because the people Jesus misses most would be exposed to his message through the very natural means of friendship, kindness, concern, and listening ears. This kind of reality would surprise and mystify them instead of confusing them. Perhaps then the missing would seek *the found* to find out more about what motivates the caring nature of those who live authentic lives.⁵⁶

The formation of this community finds its authorship and impetus in the heart of God. Grenz pursues this concept:

According to the Bible, God's ultimate desire is to create from all nations a reconciled people living within a renewed creation and enjoying the presence of the Triune God. This biblical vision of "community" is the goal of history . . . we know that we have encountered God in that we have been brought to share in community, that is, as we enjoy fellowship with God and participate in the people of faith . . . The participation in community with God, each other, and creation offers a final answer not only to the question about the possibility of knowing God but also the question of God's existence.⁵⁷

Jesus followers become "gateways"⁵⁸ for people around them when Christians live out his love in their relationships. Nouwen writes, "The mystery of ministry is that we have been chosen to make our own limited and very conditional love the gateway for the unlimited and unconditional love of God."

When individuals understand and experience the love of God as revealed in the Gospel, their hearts are transformed into the heart of Jesus. Their relationships can reflect the love, forgiveness, acceptance, and authenticity of the relationship they have with Christ. When Christians embrace these truths they reach out and embrace each other as

⁵⁶ Jim Henderson, *Evangelism without Additives: What If Sharing Your Faith Meant Just Being Yourself?* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2007), 45.

⁵⁷ Grenz, *Created for Community*, 38.

⁵⁸ Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 62.

Jesus embraces them, and they form circles of friendship and communities with Christ as the nucleus. Jesus makes this promise, "For where two or three gather together because they are mine, I am there among them" (Matt. 18:20). When we embrace these truths and each other, we are ready to embrace others outside of the circle.

The development of community involves two essential ingredients: trust and acceptance. Trust is the initial ingredient that enables all else, and Christians can prompt the trust of others by being transparent and vulnerable. The authors of *Building Community* write, "Trust is the ability to risk oneself, and there is no trust-building without risk . . . God's mandate is clear: life comes through relationship to self, to others, and to God. These relationships only mature in the crucible of trust."⁵⁹

Christ "dwelling in the midst of them" is discernable when the incarnated community builds bridges of trust and provides a climate where individuals grow in self-confidence, transparency, and risk vulnerability. Mutual trust must be evident in order for people to build relationships. Mutual trust grows with self-disclosure, but self-disclosure does not happen unless individuals experience the second essential for community, acceptance.

If there is a discernible sense of acceptance, more will be shared and trust will develop. The relationship continues to grow as both persons continue to trust and be self-disclosing . . . Trust demands the presence of a number of qualities, especially openness, sharing and acceptance. Openness is a quality of being candid, combined with a confidence in the goodness of the other. Sharing is the willingness to be vulnerable by committing thoughts, ideas and feelings into words. Acceptance is the quality of receiving the openness and sharing of the

⁵⁹ Loughlan Sofield, Rosine Hammett, and Carroll Juiano, *Building Community: Christian, Caring, Vital* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria, 1998), 52.

other . . . [it] is communicating to members an appreciation of who and what they are.⁶⁰

Too often life opposes or prevents openness, sharing, and acceptance, which are alien elements in society's contemporary media, politics, and daily existence. However, when those qualities exist within the community of Jesus followers, it demonstrates love greater than of human origin. Jean Vanier writes:

The difference between community and a group of friends is that in a community we verbalize our mutual belonging and bonding. We announce the goals and the spirit that unites us. We recognize also that this bonding comes from God; it is a gift from God. It is he who has chosen us and called us together in a covenant of love and mutual caring.⁶¹

Individuals build walls that block community. These walls block others, but they become walls of isolation that trap the builder within. God breaks down walls, and Paul writes, ". . . you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Jean Vanier articulates the essence of acceptance:

Communities are truly communities when they are open to others, when they remain vulnerable and humble; when the members are growing in love, in compassion and in humility. Communities cease to be such when members close in upon themselves with the certitude that they alone have wisdom and truth and expect everyone to be like them and learn from them. The fundamental attitudes of true community, where there is true belonging, are openness, welcome, and listening to God, to the universe, to each other and to other communities. . . . Sects put up walls and barriers out of fear, out of a need to prove themselves and to create a false security. Community is the breaking down of barriers to welcome difference.⁶²

⁶⁰ Ibid., 54-56.

⁶¹ Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1989), 18.

⁶² Ibid., 19-20.

Experiencing true love, acceptance, forgiveness, and trustworthiness through God's love relationship with believers enables them to risk breaking down the walls, opening up their circles of relationships, and including those outside Christ's community. The circle is broadened and a new community is formed.

Birth is not the culmination of life, just the beginning, and the same holds true for a community. The community formation is the inauguration, and once formed, it remains vibrant and alive through wholesome relationships, forgiveness, and loving service. Jesus stated that the foundational principle of the Bible and his Kingdom-community is based on relationships of love:

Jesus replied, "You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself. The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments." (Matt. 22:37-40)

Community is sustained through loving relationships between God, individuals, and others. The love relationship between God and believers forms the boundaries, context, and means by which they live out relationships with others. Grenz writes,

The church is more than a loosely related group of people. We share a fundamental vertical commitment—loyalty to Christ—which shapes our very lives. But our common allegiance to Jesus, in turn, forms a bond between us that is greater than all other human bonds.⁶³

God's unconditional, unfailing love heals, fills, transforms, and teaches love for each other. The vertical love dimension recreates horizontal relationships. Grenz suggests,

⁶³ Grenz, *Created for Community*, 213.

This felt bond adds a horizontal commitment to the vertical. Our common allegiance to Jesus draws us together. Because of our loyalty to him, we are committed to each other. We desire to “walk” together as one discipleship band, to be a people in relationship with one another. We who name Jesus as Lord, therefore, become one body—a fellowshiping people, a community . . . God’s purpose is the salvation of individuals. But God saves us *together*, not in isolation. And he saves us *for* community, not *out of* it.⁶⁴

It is in the context of the healed and restored vertical relationship with God that broken horizontal relationships with others are made whole. Sofield, Hammett, and Juliano write, “When we realize how much God has forgiven us, we can be more forgiving of others. The cost of that forgiveness has already been paid in the love of Christ on the cross.”⁶⁵

Forgiveness is the suture that binds broken relationships, and love breaks down the walls of separation. Love redirects individuals toward each other, and forgiveness produces reconciliation. Without forgiveness there is no possibility of restored relationships because, as Grenz suggests, forgiveness spans the chasms that divide and separate.

Community is the place of forgiveness . . . If we come into community without knowing that the reason we come is to learn to forgive and be forgiven seven times seventy-seven times, we will soon be disappointed . . . To forgive is also to understand the cry behind the behavior . . . To forgive is also to look into oneself and to see where one should . . . also ask for forgiveness and make amends. To forgive is to recognize once again . . . the covenant which binds us together with those we do not get along with well . . . It is to give them *space in our hearts*.⁶⁶

Forgiveness cleans out the accumulated grudges and negative baggage, and opens “space in our hearts” to be loved. Forgiveness is fertile soil in which relationships grow

⁶⁴ Ibid., 214.

⁶⁵ Sofield, Hammett, and Juliano, *Building Community*, 97.

⁶⁶ Grenz, *Created for Community*, 37-38. (Emphasis mine).

and thrive, and a bountiful harvest requires loving service. Jesus defined loving service in the Kingdom-community when he addressed the disciples about their power squabbles:

“But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:26-28).

Love for God and others constrains our actions and controls our dealings, and loving care for each other in community is its sustaining lifeblood. Grenz writes:

We are to be a community bound together by the love present among us through the power of God’s Spirit. This divine love is exemplified by humble service to each other and to the world. Indeed, as we exist in love, we are the image of God—that is, we reflect what God is like. Thereby, we bring glory to him, for we exemplify the love that lays at the heart of the dynamic of the Triune God, which Christ himself has revealed to us.⁶⁷

The Disney movie *Dumbo* tracks the chain of events in the little elephant’s life. Much to the chagrin and embarrassment of the circus elephant community, Dumbo is born with extremely oversized ears. Dumbo experiences increasing ostracism until, finally, after his mother’s incarceration because of her defensive actions on his behalf, the other elephants take action. When little Dumbo enters the circus wagon, all the elephants form a circle, heads inward, rumps out, close ranks, and block Dumbo from inclusion. He is banned from elephant society.

That movie scene reflects the feelings and conditions of many in the emerging culture. They feel excluded, isolated, and lonely and ask: “Who am I? Where do I

⁶⁷ Ibid., 218.

belong? Where will I find real authentic love and relationships and community?" Like little Dumbo, they want to know they are accepted, valued, and loved. They live in a world filled with exclusive "elephant communities," and God feels their pain and responds with a circle of belonging.

Nature provides another example of circling behavior in the animal world, but this example is the antithesis of the circle in Dumbo's world. It is the circle of inclusivity exhibited by musk oxen who form a defensive formation when threatened. They first run to a higher location, turn, face outward, and stand shoulder-to-shoulder in a circle. They form an impenetrable wall with their heads lowered. The young, aged, and ill are protected in the circle's center, and no predator can breach the circle. Followers of Jesus are called to form a similar circle of belonging.

The early Celtic Christian community created a unique representation of the cross that symbolizes Christ's Kingdom-community. The vertical member of the cross represents love and community experienced with the Triune God, and the horizontal member of the cross represents love relationships with others. However, unless the horizontal and vertical converge, relational community is unrealized. The writer of 1 John declares:

If someone says, "I love God," but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we have not seen? And God himself has commanded that we must love not only him but our Christian brothers and sisters, too. (1 John 4:21-22)

The vertical and horizontal members must converge to provide Christian community, and this convergence creates the circle. Doherty writes that Celtic Christians called this “sacred space,” which defined their community:

This Christian community was sacred ground. It carried with it all the circular elements of Celtic spirituality but most importantly the early Celtic Christian communities were thin spots, in the circle the sacred world and the material world were one. The kingdom of God, or the fulfillment of God, was present in community; in fact, God was present in their midst . . . They believed the sacred and the secular were not separate on earth and that in their community heaven joined to earth. This was especially true in the case of the sacred circle. They believed that by drawing a circle, imagining a circle, or building a circle they could make sacred space.⁶⁸

The circle of belonging is a place of love and forgiveness, acceptance and involvement where the Gospel becomes reality. It is, what I would describe as an “inter-place” like the interweave motif of a Celtic cross. Inter-place is a communal emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical place where individual lives and experience interweave. It is a place of warmth, acceptance, and authenticity about life and struggles where individuals live deeply with each other.

⁶⁸ Doherty, *A Celtic Model of Ministry*, 45.

SECTION 4

THE PROJECT

The project is the production of a book that enables individuals and/or groups to understand emerging culture dynamics and how to create safe spaces for sharing stories and building relationships that embody *Missio Dei*. Although there are many ways the gospel impacts people, including traditional propositional evangelism, the modern era modes are declining in effectiveness. In order to address this problem, we propose the creation of safe spaces for sharing personal stories and the Gospel with members of the emerging culture. This will produce natural enculturation and organic relationships because the full realization of Christ comes through personification in community. I chose this media form because a book provides easy access to the material and disseminates the information effectively over a broad spectrum of situations. The readers will be Christian leaders and faculty who work in cross-cultural and multi-ethnic environments where modernism and postmodernism meet. The subject matter may also attract an expanded audience as more Christians participate in the *Missio Dei* and relate to the emerging culture. The subject of this project is pertinent to pastors, teachers, ministry leaders, small group facilitators, neighbors, and coworkers.

SECTION 5

PROJECT SPECIFICATIONS

Submitting a Complete Proposal to InterVarsity Press¹

Submit your proposal to InterVarsity Press only if you have had direct contact with one of our editors, are associated with a college or seminary, are a pastor or have previously published a book. All other manuscripts should be submitted to The Writer's Edge and ChristianManuscriptSubmissions.com for review by InterVarsity Press.

1. A cover letter (about two single-spaced pages including:

- A concept statement. In 50 to 100 words summarize what the problem or main issue is that your book will address, the subject and scope of your book, who you are writing for and what benefits it will offer readers.
- Your passion for the book. Tell why you are passionate about the idea for your book, why your message is important, and how it will make a difference.
- Who the book is for. Explain who the audience is, how you know those who are in your target audience and why your book will communicate effectively to them.

¹ The InterVarsity Press, <http://www.ivpress.com/submissions/> (accessed August 8, 2008).

- The length of the book. Estimate how many typewritten, double-spaced pages it will be or its projected word count. The schedule for the book. If the book is not already completed, tell us when you think you would have the first complete draft ready to submit.
2. A chapter-by-chapter summary. Outlines are not helpful because they only list the topics to be covered and not what you intend to say about those topics. Instead provide one or two paragraphs summarizing each chapter.
 3. A review of competing/similar books. List four to six recent books that are most similar to yours. List title, author, publisher, price and length for each. In a couple sentences explain how your book is different from each similar book.
 4. One or two sample chapters. This will allow the editor to see how you write as well as give a sample of the level, tone and approach you will take. An introductory chapter and a representative chapter from the middle of the book are best.
 5. Biographical information. Identify your background and what your credentials are for writing on this topic, including your education and experiences that contribute toward the writing of the book. Mention what you bring to the table that can help sell the book, such as well-known people that you know who could endorse the book, mailing lists you have access to, regular conferences you speak at, organizations who would participate in promoting the book or buying copies in bulk, and the like.
 6. An SASE. If you want any of this material back, enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope. (Never send the only copy of any materials.)
 7. Please send to InterVarsity Press, P.O. Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60515-1426.

Submitting a Complete Proposal to WinePress Publishing²

1. First, please make sure your manuscript fits our standard of content.
2. Provide entire manuscript in one document (if you have each chapter in a separate file, you will need to combine them all by cutting and pasting the text from each chapter into one manuscript named title full manuscript).
3. Do not use the space bar to indent a new paragraph. Instead, use the TAB button or the automatic feature.
4. Begin each chapter on a new page. For fiction books, number the chapters. For nonfiction, list the chapter title under the chapter number.
5. Place a page heading in the upper left corner, which includes the title of the book and your last name (in Word, select view, then header/footer, and then type in the title and your last name).
6. Place a page number in the upper right corner, numbering the pages consecutively from beginning to end (in Word, select insert and then page numbers).
7. Include a complete table of contents. Do not include page numbers as these will change in typesetting.
8. Do not attempt to format your text, since we will be doing that on our end. This should save you lots of time!

² WinePress Publishing, <http://www.winepresspub.com/default.asp?id=8470> (accessed August 8, 2008).

Submitting a Complete Proposal to Pacific Press Publishing³

First time: If you're sending material to Pacific Press® for the first time, please start with a query letter. It should contain these elements:

- A one-sentence thesis of the book's main idea.
- A summary of the book.
- The intended audience.
- Your qualifications for writing on the topic.
- A sentence making clear whether you have written the book or are in the planning stage.
- A chapter outline if it's available.

If your manuscript includes illustrations or photos, do not place the image in the manuscript. Simply state {Place illustration 1 here - brief description of image}. Then make sure your images are named consecutively, illustration 1, illustration 2, etc. State within the brackets whether you want the image only on the page, or the text to wrap around the image, or the text to be above and below the image.

If you have footnotes, please convert to endnotes by cutting and pasting them into the last page of the manuscript.

If you are not utilizing our editorial services, be sure to proofread your manuscript carefully, following the Chicago Manual of Style 15th Edition (most libraries have copies of this useful tool). If your computer has a grammar check or spell check, run your

³ The Pacific Press Publishing, <http://www.pacificpress.com/index.php?pgName=newsBookSub> (accessed August 8, 2008).

manuscript through it to catch errors. Ask someone else to read your work or read it aloud to catch further mistakes.

How to Submit a Query

Email, mail, and fax queries are acceptable. Telephone queries are discouraged.

Email queries: Book Submissions

Mail queries (be sure to include SASE if you would like a response by mail):

Book Acquisitions Editor
Pacific Press
PO Box 5353
Nampa, ID 83653-5353
Fax queries: 208-465-2531

Typical response time for queries: 3 weeks

How to Submit a Proposal

If a book editor responds to your query with a request for a proposal, or, if you have been published by Pacific Press® before and wish to submit a new proposal:

- Send three chapters and a chapter outline or annotated contents page.
- Write a cover letter and include the main thesis, the purpose of the book, the potential audience, and proposed length.
- Indicate whether you have submitted simultaneously to other publishers.
- Email submissions sent to Book Submissions are preferred.
- Expect the typical response time for a proposal to be 3–4 months.

About Submitting Manuscripts

- Please do not send a complete manuscript unless an editor asks for it. Authors who skip over the proposal and submit a complete unsolicited manuscript can expect to wait up to one year for a response. Unsolicited manuscripts receive the lowest priority because they are time-consuming to review.
- To ensure a prompt response, please use a query letter or proposal, even if your manuscript is already completed.

SECTION 6

POSTSCRIPT

I describe experiences in the doctoral program and the production of my written statement and project in two words: life shifting. Before I heard of George Fox University, I realized that the world and culture were changing drastically. The old tried and true ways did not produce the expected outcomes. Traditional evangelism and outreach had minimal success at best. The questions I learned during my ministerial career were not even being asked. There were in fact new questions and answers I could not address.

I sought a changed job description. I wanted to change from being a campus chaplain whose job demanded he cook up new recipes for evangelism on campus. I wanted to become a midwife who assists in the miracle birth of Christ's Kingdom of Heaven on campus, and those desires led me to my present course of studies. Those studies taught me that followers of Jesus can embody the Gospel in the emerging culture through a missional approach that creates safe spaces for sharing personal stories and developing organic relationships. The result is the realization of the Kingdom that Jesus proclaims in the Gospels.

I identified three goals. First, I wanted to learn the stories of the students, faculty, and staff of Loma Linda University (LLU). I wanted to learn the cultures, histories, and textures of the campus and understand how they are involved in conversations. How do

the divergent players interact in the story of life played out on the campus stage? What do they believe? What are their God stories? What scripts do they dream about for their lives? What tales form their realities? How do they share and communicate?

Second, my goal was to discover the emerging Gospel for LLU. Ellen White was one of the founding leaders of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, and she coined a phrase that applied to this phase of my project: "Present Truth." This means that the Gospel is timeless and unchanging, but how we are involved in conversations about the Gospel must be relevant and speak to the surrounding culture.

Third, I sought to develop modalities that interweave the emerging LLU culture and the emerging Gospel. What is LLU's emerging culture? What metaphors of the Gospel speak to that culture? How can these two interweave? Where can these conversations take place? My goal was to develop spaces where the birthing process could come to term.

My learning and discovery process took several twists and turns. The first twist was from "What?" to "Aha!" and was orchestrated by Leonard Sweet through sagacious discipling and an assigned, mind expanding reading list. I learned about postmodernism and emerging culture. The ideas began to make sense and have discernable patterns, but the next turn went from "Aha!" to "Oh no!" I realized I was in uncharted waters including the shortcomings of the modern paradigms and its inability to address postmodern needs and concerns. I sought something to take its place. I also realized that a complete shift from modernism to postmodernism had not occurred because both infiltrated the surrounding culture. Some persons respond to modern paradigms, others

respond to postmodern modes. I asked, “Could there be a blending of paradigms or must they be addressed independently?”

The next turn was from “Oh no!” to “Amen!” I realized, it is not a case of either or, and both could be addressed. Jesus used this approach when he walked and ministered on this earth. This approach is anchored in relationships whose nexus is love as defined and demonstrated in God’s love for us. My exploration of these concepts stimulated production of my project book and what I termed InterPlace and the Circle of Belonging.

The project book is a beginning, and other issues remain. For example, how can the InterPlace concept be developed into modalities that address the varied levels of human relationships? Could it express itself through different methodologies from the ones that I identified? It must, and I do not believe in a one-size-fits-all method. Can the InterPlace concept be adapted to the modern era church concepts? Is it effective in other venues? Is the InterPlace concept effective only in shorter implementation periods, or could it be sustained in an ongoing way?

The triumph of my project book lies in my discovery that the Kingdom Community Jesus espoused contains elements the emerging culture seeks: authenticity, belonging, loving. It lies in the empowering thought that Jesus followers can provide spaces for developing relationships God dreams for all people and He will change lives for eternity.

My thoughts about my doctoral journey are summarized in a quote by Morris West in *The Shoes of the Fisherman*:

It costs so much to be a full human being that there are few who have the enlightenment, or the courage, to pay the price. One has to abandon altogether the search for security and reach out to the risk of living with both arms. One has to embrace the world like a lover, and yet demand no easy return of love. One has to accept the pain as a condition of existence. One has to court doubt and darkness as the cost of knowing. One needs a will stubborn in conflict, but open always to the total acceptance of every consequence of living and dying.¹

¹ Morris L. West, *The Shoes of the Fisherman* (New York: Morrow, 1963), 254

APPENDIX A

INTERPLACE: THE CIRCLE OF BELONGING

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INTRODUCTION

THE CIRCLE OF BELONGING

I don't really remember how old I was. I do know that I was still young enough that my bedtime in summer meant I'd be in bed before the sun had set. It was in the days when I still had to share a room with my sister, Kathi. As a matter of fact, we *both* had been put to bed, but sleep hadn't claimed us yet. We played, we told stories, we made animal noises—quietly, though, because we didn't want to disturb Momma in her room right next to us. Momma was ill—very ill. When we finally started to run out of steam, we paused and lay quietly for awhile.

Kathi broke the silence with a spiritual insight, "Let's pray to Jesus and ask Him to make Momma well!"

Great idea! Because of the gravity of her situation we prayed a long prayer using as important of words as we could. (I guess we thought that this would be more impressive to God.) When we finished I asked my sister if she thought that God heard us. Being that she was three years older than me, I felt she was more experienced in these matters. She thought for a moment. Her face brightened as she proclaimed her epiphany. "I know," she said. "Let's ask God to touch us! Then we'll know for sure that He heard us!" What a great idea! We lay in our beds waiting to be touched. Nothing happened. "Maybe we should help God," she said. "Maybe he needs us to reach up to Him?" So we

stretched our arms up as high as we could. I don't know how long we laid there with our arms outstretched. Eventually, we fell asleep. God never touched my hand.

Looking back, I think that something significant happened to me that day. There was a deep disappointment and disconnect in my theology. Maybe God only lived in the Bible stories. Maybe I was too far away for Him to reach out and touch me. No matter how I longed for Him to touch me.

In my teen years, I left God behind. I didn't care if He touched me. In all honesty, I doubted if He even existed. And, if He did, I wanted no part of Him. As for the church community I grew up in? I discovered a divergence between the "truth" propositions they proclaimed and their reality lived out in certain individual lives. So, I disconnected with them, too. I'd find others to touch and who would touch me. I'd live in a community of "anything goes" and "no holds barred."

Instead of finding a fabric of relationships I found a place of rags. Most relationships were one-sided affairs with each participant only seeking what worked best for them. I reached out, stretching as far as I could, but still only touched emptiness.

I quit reaching. I locked away my need to be touched behind thick walls in a deep place in my heart. Other things would fill my time and focus. The thing is that they never did "fill" me. Nothing did. Until the day that God *did* touch me! Until I realized the reality of the Gospel, that it's all about a Person and a relationship! It's all about His love for me! It's all about Him coming to get me and bringing me back into His arms and into relationship with Him. It's about living in a relational community of love with God and, then, with others. A community of people, just like, me that longed to be touched by love.

But where does this community exist? Does it reside within the walls and organizational structures we call “church”? Or does the emerging culture we live in call for something and/or somewhere else? Author and futurist, Leonard Sweet encapsulates this quandary:

The church has divested itself of the connection business in order to master the principle business. Its school of thought is now a school of ought. The church is by and large no longer in the relationship business . . . The future belongs to the connectors, to those who can help people connect the lone and lonely dots of their lives and their world so that the big picture of wholeness and holiness can emerge. The gospel of Jesus Christ creates disciples with a two-word mission statement: “Only Connect.”¹

Perhaps the question as to “where” this community exists is an improper one. Perhaps the question would be better stated as “in *whom* and *among whom* does this community exist?” Jesus proclaimed that His Kingdom is a relational one:

Jesus replied, “You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.” (Matt. 22:37-40)

This is no rocket science revelation. This statement of Jesus has been with the church since its inception. Throughout the centuries Christ’s kingdom-community concept has been lived out in various means and methodologies. The staggering question that confronts us is “How do we live it out today?” In a world that changes before our eyes; in a world of vast diversity; in a world that red lines through each moment; how can we “*help people connect the lone and lonely dots of their lives and their world so that the big picture of wholeness and holiness can emerge*”?

There is a way. How can I make such a categorical declaration? Because it is the desire of God's heart that we find the way! It is the basis of Christ's mission to this earth. It's what He dreams of for His kingdom. So, take heart fellow follower of Jesus! Peterson writes in reference to Luke 14:28-33:

Is there anyone here who, planning to build a new house, doesn't first sit down and figure the cost so you'll know if you can complete it? If you only get the foundation laid and then run out of money, you're going to look pretty foolish. Everyone passing by will poke fun at you: "He started something he couldn't finish." Or can you imagine a king going into battle against another king without first deciding whether it is possible with his ten thousand troops to face the twenty thousand troops of the other? And if he decides he can't, won't he send an emissary and work out a truce? Simply put, if you're not willing to take what is dearest to you, whether plans or people, and kiss it good-bye, you can't be my disciple.²

Before we look at the "how" we need to take the steps that Jesus is advising in this passage from Luke. Jesus points out that, if we really want to be His disciples and follow Him, then we need to be willing to do what ever it takes, learn and *un-learn* whatever is needed. This means that we need to view things in a brand new way with an openness to adjust our personal paradigms accordingly.

In this book, we will journey through a two phase process. We will start by taking Jesus' advice and figure out what's going on in the culture around us and just what are we looking at as we seek to live the *missio Dei*.³

The second phase will take us through the process of "how": How do we communicate the Gospel to a culture that is turned off by Christianity? How do we build community in such a culturally diverse society? How do we make the kingdom dreams of Jesus a reality?

There is a way. It is a way that is both as old as the Gospels and as new as today. It is taking the community concepts that Jesus shared and living them in the emerging world we find ourselves in.

Notes

¹ Leonard I. Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2007). 144, 146.

² Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002).

³ “When kept in the context of the Scriptures, *missio Dei* correctly emphasizes that God is the initiator of His mission to redeem through the Church a special people for Himself from all of the peoples (*τα ἔθνη*) of the world. He sent His Son for this purpose and He sends the Church into the world with the message of the gospel for the same purpose”. Van Sanders, “The Mission of God and the Local Church,” in *Pursuing the Mission of God in Church Planting*, ed. John M. Bailey (Alpharetta, GA: North American Mission Board, 2006), 24.

CHAPTER 1

SETTING THE STAGE: THINGS HAVE CHANGED

Four blind men were making there way together through a forest when they happened upon an elephant. They had never encountered such a creature before and wondered what it was like. One man touched the elephant's trunk and proclaimed, "Ah! An elephant is like a snake!" The second man disagreed. He was touching the tail. "No, an elephant is like a paint brush!" The third man, who was feeling the side of the elephant, stated, "You are both wrong. An elephant is like a house." To which the fourth man, who felt the elephant's leg, quickly commented, "All of you are mistaken! An elephant is like a tree." The important point for us is that the way we perceive the whole of something is greatly determined by our own perspective of it. If those men were to understand what an elephant was really like, they would need to step back and take in different perspectives in addition to there their own.

When I was a little boy, television was the technological marvel that was changing my world. Our TV was not like the giant flat screen wonders of today. The screens were *much* smaller. The only "colors" we had were black and white. The innards were vacuum tubes that had to warm up before you got a picture. Sitting on top of the set was a rabbit ear antenna that we constantly had to fiddle with to try and get a good picture. I was the "remote control" for my Dad! We had a whopping seven channels to choose from! Each night at midnight the "Star Spangled Banner" would play and the

stations would go off the air until morning. I was willing to sit before our TV's glow and watch for as many hours as I could get away with. Those were the days of rocket ships and cowboys and dogs that did heroic deeds. Yet, even as a grade-schooler, I knew that it was all actors and make believe. You could say that I was savvy about the media I experienced.

My grandmother was a different story. She was born in the late 1800s on a farm in the rural South. Grandma grew up in a home where lighting was kerosene lamps, plumbing was a hand pump and a well and the bathroom was an outhouse. When I was about seven or eight, Grandma came to visit us in California for the first time. She was in her seventies at the time. Amazingly, ours was the first television she had ever seen! One of my favorite westerns was on. I was sitting in my little rocking chair planted squarely in front of the screen as close as my Mom would let me. (There was a "no viewing" zone where I wasn't allowed to sit because she was afraid of radiation destroying my brain!) Grandma was sitting on the sofa near me. The bad guys in the black hats were sneaking up on the good guy hero in the white hat to ambush him. Suddenly guns started to blaze! The bad guys missed, but our hero spun around and filled 'em full of lead! I cheered, but Grandma yelled out, "Lord have mercy! That feller killed those men! What kind of devil machine is this?!" at which point she started shouting for my mother.

I sat there stunned! I couldn't believe it! She thought that the show was *real*! She thought that those guys had *really* been shot dead! I told her, "Grandma! Those guys aren't dead! They're only actors! It's all just make believe! They'll probably be on the show next week!" To which my Grandma sternly replied, "Young man, I have lived a lot

longer than you! My eyes work just fine and I know what I saw! And I *saw* that feller shoot those other boys!” Mom came and finally calmed Grandma down, but it took quite a number of shows watched until she caught on to how TV worked. The upside? Grandma learned to embrace modern technology. The downside? She took over the TV and forced me to watch shows like *Lawrence Welk*! Polka was her favorite! Somehow I survived relatively undamaged!

Grandma lived to be ninety-nine years old. In her lifetime, she saw transportation change from horse and wagon to cars and space travel. Communication changed from handwritten letters and telegraphs to airmail and telephones.¹ That is a lot of change for one lifetime! But it is nothing compared to the mega-shifts we’ve experienced in the last few decades. Pause for a moment and do a mental inventory of things that have happened, changed or been invented since 1980. In less than three decades: the Soviet Union and the threat of Communist world domination disintegrated; personal computers are common place (they didn’t even exist in 1980!); cell phones are owned and operating in even the remotest areas of earth; the Internet has modified our communication and learning beyond dimensions we are still discovering. And that doesn’t even scratch the surface of the list!

Every aspect of our lives has experienced major changes. When I was growing up, it wasn’t until I was in high school that I knew a family that had experienced a divorce. Now, there is a growing comfortability, if not an expectancy, with the idea that a marriage won’t last. George Barna, head of Barna Research, makes the following observations:

There no longer seems to be much of a stigma attached to divorce; it is now seen as an unavoidable rite of passage . . . Interviews with young adults suggest that they want their initial marriage to last, but are not particularly optimistic about that possibility. There is also evidence that many young people are moving toward embracing the idea of serial marriage, in which a person gets married two or three times, seeking a different partner for each phase of their adult life.²

The institution of marriage is being redefined in ways unimaginable a few years ago. The days of extended family units living in an area for generations has pretty much gone the way of the dinosaur!³ Add to that the reconfiguration of the traditional nuclear family into a plethora of combinations. We tend to move around multiple times in our lives. We don't even stay in one job or one career until retirement and the "gold watch" anymore! We face numerous job changes and even numerous career changes in our future if we are to adapt and stay afloat. And what about the culture that we live in?

My early childhood was in the late 1950s when most of America seemed to be as homogenous as whole milk and *Leave It To Beaver*! So I tend to filter life through the lenses of my experiences. Yet the world is filled with experiences as diverse as the individuals living them. Mine are not yours and yours are not mine. But there are things that we experience and share in common—just like the four blind men shared the encounter with the elephant. One thing we share is that *all* of us will encounter change.

Those of us in Christian communities are not exempt:

Living on the edge is like living on the ledge, which means one can easily topple off into the abyss. Living on the ledge means one lives at knife-edge where once can easily be torn to shreds. Living at the precise point where two things come into contact and don't overlap means one has to go one way or the other. Scissors are useful, but we can't recommend living in between the blades. Yet, saying all this, we say it again: There is no more exciting time to be in ministry than now when the entire planet seems poised at the edge of a profound transformation.⁴

Change is here. Change is constant. Change is something that all of us must deal with.

One could say that encountering change is as predictable as death and taxes and as necessary as breathing for our survival, so why do we avoid it so much? A growing number of us live a part of our life in a virtual community of emailing, texting, and blogging. Maybe you'll resonate with what "Skylight" the blogger said about why we avoid change:

Most people like to stick with what they know, even if it isn't in their best interest. They do so, because it is something in this chaotic world that they can "depend" on being a certain way. They feel like what they have known, they understand, and can trust to remain a certain way. It becomes kind of a "false security." They become attached to it, and would rather suffer through something not in their best interest, that they can *count on*, than take a chance with the unknown. No one knows how they will function in a strange situation, and this is frightening for a lot of people, like toppling freefall off a cliff, and not knowing how, or where you'll land. It involves risk, often courage, and a belief that you'll be ok, no matter what.⁵

It doesn't take a microscopic scrutiny of Skylight's blog to see that negative feelings like fear and uncertainty are main motivators to avoid change. This thought is echoed by marketing expert, trainer, and author, Doug Firebaugh:

Here is a sad rule of life that we all . . . must accept: "Most people resist change in their life." Why? Mainly, when change has entered a person's life in the past, it usually came in the form of a loss, not a gain. It carried with it Pain, not Pleasure. And most people equate change to something negative, verses positive. Change then becomes "Chains" that people carry around with them, because they are "Chained" to the Past, to How things are, to Fears, Doubts, and Insecurities, and they are too heavy to carry around with you . . . And they have a tendency to resist any growth at all in their life, because they are afraid that it will produce Pain, or create a Loss . . . which does not make any sense because Growth is a FORWARD function, not a Change is constant. Change is something that all of us must deal with.⁶

Change is here. Change is constant. Change is something that all of us must deal with. As followers of Jesus, change is part-and-parcel of living in His Kingdom Community. Jesus underscores this with the following discourse:

And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. For the new wine would burst the wineskins, spilling the wine and ruining the skins. New wine must be stored in new wineskins. But no one who drinks the old wine seems to want the new wine. "The old is just fine," they say. (Luke 5:37-39)

The issue isn't about the "wine" which represents God's Gospel. The issue lies in its presentation. The wineskins are what contain and convey the wine. Jesus is calling us to be able to bring His words and message to people around us in a manner that communicates to them! The Gospel is the same. The "packaging" is different. And since we are called to be the "packages" that present that lived-out Gospel, then we need to embrace the changes that Christ is calling us to make. Scary? Yes. Necessary? Yes, if we want to do what Jesus is calling us to do and be where Jesus is!

As a little boy, I loved to have my Mom read a story to me from one of my Bible story picture books. She had a way of reading that made the words come alive in my young imagination. What really helped to make the stories leap off of the page were the colorful pictures. There was one story in particular that gripped me and one picture in that story that fascinated me. It was about Jesus walking on the water. Maybe it was due to the fact that I couldn't swim without goggles because of my "healthy respect" for water. Probably it was because the idea of walking on the water was absurd even to my juvenile mind. But, there He was! Strolling along on top of the waves like He was walking down a pathway in a park! Did you ever wonder *why* Jesus did that? I don't believe that He did it

on a whim. Jesus seemed to always do things with a specific purpose in mind. In fact, Scripture indicates that Jesus set up the situation:

Immediately after this, Jesus insisted that his disciples get back into the boat and cross to the other side of the lake, while he sent the people home. After sending them home, he went up into the hills by himself to pray. Night fell while he was there alone. Meanwhile, the disciples were in trouble far away from land, for a strong wind had risen, and they were fighting heavy waves. About three o'clock in the morning, Jesus came toward them, walking on the water. (Matt. 14:22-25)

Think about what is transpiring in this story. Most of the disciples were lifelong professional fishermen. They knew how to handle boats. They'd faced plenty of storms on the lake. They could take care of it! All they needed to do was tap into their experience and skills. But, this time, it wasn't working! This time they were afraid that they would sink and drown. Enter Jesus walking on the water. The very waves that they were terrified of were nothing more than a treadmill to Jesus! They see Jesus and are petrified (do you blame them?!). It is at this point that the story starts having important implications for our discussion on facing and embracing change.

But Jesus spoke to them at once. "Don't be afraid," he said. "Take courage. I am here! Then Peter called to him, "Lord, if it's really you, tell me to come to you, walking on the water." "Yes, come," Jesus said. So Peter went over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. But when he saw the strong wind and the waves, he was terrified and began to sink. "Save me, Lord!" he shouted. Jesus immediately reached out and grabbed him. "You have so little faith," Jesus said. "Why did you doubt me?" When they climbed back into the boat, the wind stopped. Then the disciples worshiped him. "You really are the Son of God!" they exclaimed. (Matt. 14: 27-33)

By walking on the water, Jesus was showing them that all that they feared in life could be overcome through Him. They didn't, as Doug Firebaugh stated, have to stay "Chained to

the Past, to How things are, to Fears, Doubts, and Insecurities” that are too heavy to carry around with you.

There was another lesson that Jesus was trying to teach them. Where was Jesus located? In the boat? In the tried-and-true? In the conventional? No. Jesus was out on the water! Jesus is in the “change”! Jesus is calling us to trust Him, believe Him and get out of the boat and come out with Him!

During a lecture I participated in, professor, futurist, and author, Leonard Sweet presented the metaphor of a *pneumanaut* as a descriptor of being a follower of Christ.⁷ A *pneumanaut* is a sailor of the Holy Spirit. They are followers of Jesus who are guided and empowered by the *wind* directives of the Spirit’s leadership in their lives. Jesus wants us to sail on the invisible winds of His Spirit. Jesus is asking us to get out of the boat. Jesus is calling us to follow Him in ways and directions that we never dreamed possible. Sweet concluded by saying, “You have *no idea* of where God is going to take you!”

Things have changed! Things are continuing to change at a pace that takes our breath away! We might not understand it. We might not like it. We might even want to fight it or hide from it. But the reality is that change is here—and Jesus is out there in it. And He’s calling us to trust Him, come to Him where He’s at and change the world! So, how about it? Are you ready step out and set sail on the wind of the Holy Spirit and make a journey of discovery? If so, then let’s get started!

Notes

¹ Bob Roberts refers to this rapid change in our worlds with the following quote: “Business, art, communication, travel, goods, and services are all expanding tremendously. Babel is no longer a biblical

tower; it is an internet server that has connected us and continues to connect us in ways that are just plain unimaginable.” Bob Roberts Jr. *Glocalization: How Followers of Jesus Engage the New Flat World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 16.

² George Barna, “The Barna Update,” Barna.org, <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=295> (December 10, 2008).

³ The following statistics from the Economic & Social Research Council give credence to this statement: 1) Fewer people marry or cohabit now compared with 1960, fewer have children and more remain unpartnered. As a result, the proportion of their lives spend by people in nuclear family households has declined; 2) The classic extended family consisting of three generations living under the same roof, already rare in 1960, is now all but extinct. Economic & Social Research Council, “Families,” ESRC, http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Images/families_a-level_tcm6-11450.pdf (December 5, 2008).

⁴ Leonard Sweet, Brian D. McLaren, and Jerry Haselmayer, “*A*” *Is for Abductive: The Language of the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 22.

⁵ <http://askville.amazon.com/people-resist-change/AnswerViewer.do?requestId=7281396> (December 10, 2008).

⁶ Doug Firebaugh is one of the top trainers/speakers/authors in MLM in the world. He was fulltime for thirteen years in Network Marketing, and the last seven years has spent the time traveling the world speaking and training. <http://ezinearticles.com/?MLM-Success---In-MLM,-Why-Do-People-Resist-Change?&id=43848> (November 19, 2008).

⁷ The concept of being a *pneumanaut* was presented by Leonard Sweet during a lecture on August 30, 2006.

CHAPTER 2

PARADIGMS OF MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM

When I was just a small boy, my parents took me to Disneyland for my birthday. I have to confess that the many years which have transpired since then have blurred my memories of those moments. That is, except for one singular instant that stands out in high definition. I remember my parents taking me into a store in Fantasyland. It was the Magic store. And it was “magical” to my young senses!

My father told me that I could pick out anything that I wanted for a birthday present. My eyes scanned the shelves full of practical jokes, magic tricks and sorcerer’s wands. Then, they fixed on something that seemed truly magical. It was something that I had never seen before. It was a triangularly shaped piece of glass about two inches long. At first, to me it seemed like any other piece of glass. That is, until a beam of light was shown through it. That’s when the piece of glass was transformed! It changed the white light beam that entered one side into a rainbow colored beam that shown out the other! My father told me that it was a prism. That little prism became my birthday treasure.

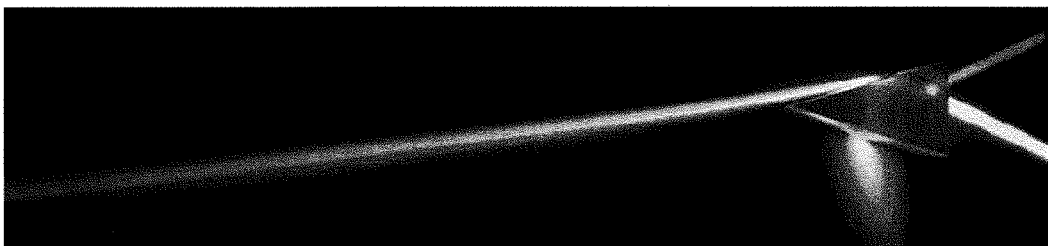


Figure 2.1. A prism

The novelty of the prism soon wore off and the “magical” gift was relegated to the bottom of my toy drawer, but not forever. A high school science project caused me to remember it. My research was to be done on prisms and how they work. The following is a brief summation of what I discovered:

In optics, a **prism** is a device used to refract light, reflect it or break it up (to disperse it) into its constituent spectral colors (colors of the rainbow). The traditional geometrical shape is that of a triangular prism, with a triangular base and rectangular sides. As light moves from one medium (e.g. air) to another denser medium (the glass of the prism), it is slowed down and as a result either bent (refracted) or reflected. The angle that the beam of light makes with the interface as well as the refractive indices of the two media determine whether it is reflected or refracted, and by how much.ⁱ

Let's boil that down:

- White light is transformed into its constituent spectral colors.
- A prism consists of planes that are not parallel and form triangular intersections.
- Light moves through one medium to another.
- The denser medium slows down the light and, depending on the angle and indices; either refracts it or reflects it.

So why am I taking you through the conclusions of a dusty high school science paper? Because within its findings, we discover a means to grasp what is going on in the culture and society around us. Once again, my little magical prism can aid in understanding the world we find ourselves in.

There are three main components of our *prism principles*: the light, the medium, and the effect. To begin with, “The Light” will address what the Gospel is and whether or not modernism and postmodernism has changed its foundational structure.ⁱⁱ

Next we will focus on “The Medium.” Here we will look at two aspects of modernism and postmodernism. The first will be a brief overview of what forms the bases of both in secular society. Secondly, we will discuss modernism and postmodernism as they are expressed through the concepts of the modern church and the emerging conversation.ⁱⁱⁱ

The final aspect of our exploration is “The Effect.” What effect does the medium of the modern church and the emerging conversation have on the praxis of the Kingdom life of the Gospel?

The Light

The absolutely essential ingredient to make a prism work is that it must receive a light source. Scientists designate this as white light. The white light contains all of the constituent spectral colors in their undifferentiated state. In my mind this is symbolic of the Gospel.

One of my first thoughts as I began my quest into the emerging conversation was whether or not the basic building block of Christianity, the Gospel, was changed. In other words, what does the Gospel look like in this modern-postmodern dialog?

My discovery was that the basics of the Gospel, the *kerygma* of Christianity, remain unchanged. The variations come in the proclamation, application and practice.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

The impetus for action resides in God. God loved. His love for the humanity that He created caused Him to act on our behalf to reconnect us to Him after sin had separated us. The action that God performed was to give His Son, Jesus. Jesus incarnates God in the world. Jesus’ life in this world and death on the cross is the means of reconnecting us with God. Our response is to believe and accept what Christ has done. The resulting reconnection establishes God’s Kingdom, both the here-and-now and the one-to-come, in its full revelation:

Jesus replied, “‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the other commandments and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.” (Matt. 22:37-40)

The Kingdom paradigm that Jesus sets up is one that is based on love. The living out of these love relationships with God, others and oneself is the *modus operandi* of how citizenship in this Kingdom is to exist and thrive. Brian McLaren refers to this concept when referencing John 17:3. He makes the following statement: “In other words, ‘This is eternal life, to have an interactive relationship with the only true God and with Jesus Christ, his messenger.’ Interestingly, that’s what a kingdom is, too: an interactive relationship with a king, the king’s other subjects, and so on.”^{iv}

All this newness of life is from God, who brought us back to himself through what Christ did. And God has given us the task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them . . . We are Christ’s ambassadors, and God is using us to speak to you. (2 Cor. 5:18-20)

At this point, the restorational relationship circle is completed with the incarnational aspect of our interaction with the world. The basis of the Gospel remains the same. However for moderns and postmoderns the living out of these Gospel imperatives and their ramifications take divergent trajectories.

The Medium

Let's return for a moment to our definition of how a prism works. The white light that enters the prismatic structure stays constant. It is the construction of the prism that causes the white light to be broken up into its constituent spectral colors. The shape of the prism is a triangle made up of rectangular sides. What determines whether the white light entering it will either be dispersed in the colors of the rainbow or simply reflected away is made by the proximity and angle of the sides of the prism. It should also be noted that the planes or indices converge and are angular to each other. Two parallel planes will not work as a prism. It works the same way with modernism and postmodernism. They are not two parallel phenomena. Rather there is an intersection and interaction between them.

So let's turn our attention to two aspects of modernism and postmodernism. The first will be a brief overview of what forms the bases of both in secular society. Secondly, we will discuss modernism and postmodernism as they are expressed through the concepts of the modern church and the emerging church.

Note the following diagram and its application to modernism and postmodernism. For the sake of illustration we will continue to use a prism as our metaphor. One

refractive index represents modernism. The other refractive index represents postmodernism. The white light represents the informational and sensory input of life.

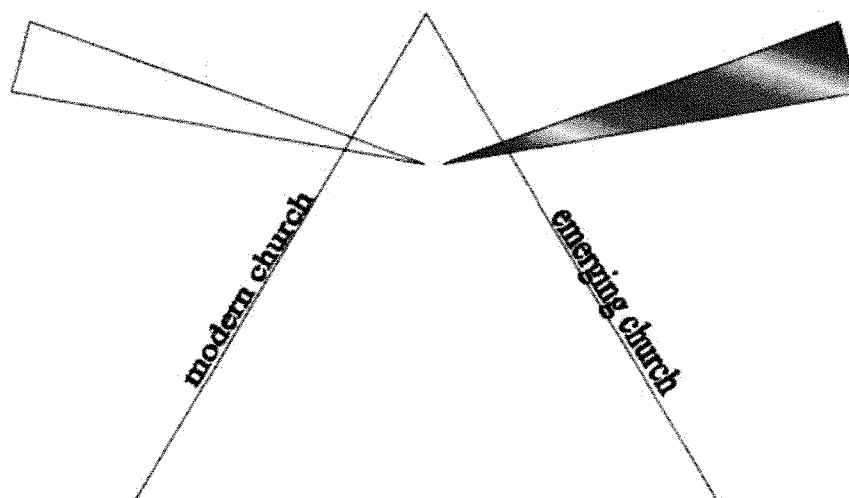


Figure 2.2. The modern church and the emerging church

What are the main characteristics of modernism and the modern “refractive index.”^v For our purposes perhaps the most concise and insightful definition comes from the book, *A is for Abductive: The Language of the Emerging Church*. One of the most prominent individuals of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther and his famous statement, “Here I stand” is pointed out as a summarization of the essential description of modernity:

Here=Present: Modernity focused on the here and now. It understood itself as having moved beyond the past.

I=Individualism: Descartes’ later dictum “I think therefore I am” doubled the emphasis on “I”—the individual knower, the autonomous individual increasingly disconnected from both the human community and the Creator.

Stand=Static Propositions and Stable Physical Laws: The modern world was confident that, just as there were discernable laws that governed the physical universe, there were free-floating moral laws and spiritual standards upon which

one could stand in certainty . . . Modernity as a broad cultural movement has pursued several key themes:

Conquest/control: Of nature by technology; of mystery by research and analysis; of flaws in human nature by institutions.

Mechanization: Machines have become not only the tools of conquest, but also the metaphor by which we understand ourselves, our world, and even God.

Rationalism/secular science: Using empirical analysis and experimentation, all mysteries can be replaced with knowledge and all problems can be solved with technology.

Reductionism: The belief that big things can be understood by breaking them down into smaller constituent parts, and that the ultimate truth of things is discovered in their analysis, dissection, or reduction.

Individualism: A valuing of individual liberties and pursuits, and a suspicion of any reality that limits individual freedom and desire.

Consumerism/materialism: A shared goal of both capitalism and communism (modernity's two primary economic systems), based on the belief that money will in fact buy happiness that is to be had.^{vi}

When we come to a brief definition of the postmodern "refractive index" concise definitions are harder to come by. The overall consensus for this being that postmodernism is better described as a work in progress. Its full dimensions have not been conclusively discerned or delineated. It is fluid and alive and forming while we are living in it.^{vii} This is illustrated by the following assertion of author, David Morley:

Postmodernism has been the subject of intense debate in recent years and yet it remains unclear, to many people, what the phenomenon actually amounts to. Those writing about postmodernism exhibit no central consensus as to what it actually refers, in concrete terms, and those who have criticized the whole postmodern project aim their barbs at quite disparate parties.^{viii}

In this work, Morley utilizes D. Hebdige's method of considering postmodernism as a series of negations of modernism: the rejection of totalization, the rejection of teleology, and the rejection of Utopianism.

Against totalization ("no total solutions"): By this, Hebdige refers to the widespread rejection of all the generalizing aspirations of the Enlightenment—all those discourses which set out to define an essential human nature, to prescribe a particular destiny to human history and to define collective human goals. Thus, postmodernists reject the universalist claims of modernist discourses.

Against teleology ("you can't know anything for certain"): By this, Hebdige means the increasing skepticism in postmodern circles, regarding the ideal of decidable origins and causes in human affairs, as evinced by any form of 'depth model' of the universe (which unites all modernist discourses, such as Marxism, psychoanalysis and structuralism).

Against Utopia ("don't go mistaking paradise for that home across the road"): The third negation, according to Dick Hebdige, is that of any notion (or model) of a Utopia, against which present societies might be judged and found wanting. The problem, it is argued, is that once you set out on this road, fortified by notions like having 'God' or 'history' on your side . . . you end up instigating a terroristic process, justifying the elimination of your enemies by reference to the ultimate justice of your goal and the rightness of your cause.^{ix}

No total solutions. No one knows anything for certain. All things are relative.

Those statements are the antithesis of modernism. They are the opposites of the world that many of us grew up in. They also underline the fast paced twists and turns that our culture and society are accelerating through.

Before we move on, there is one more aspect of postmodernism that we need to touch on. It has to do with the postmodern development of virtual communities as a replacement for the more traditional communal structures of modernity. Whereas once upon a time, a community was determined on a geographical basis (where you lived and who you lived beside) now, more often than not, community is developed in the virtual

realm of media—predominantly the medium of the Internet. “Virtual communities” form around common bonds and interests versus the boundaries such as suburban, rural or urban neighborhoods. Mark Poster highlights these concepts in his essay entitled “Postmodern Virtualities”:

Electronic media are supporting an equally profound transformation of cultural identity. Telephone, radio, film, television, the computer and now their integration as ‘multimedia’ reconfigure words, sounds and images so as to cultivate new configurations of individuality. If modern society may be said to foster an individual who is rational, autonomous, centered and stable . . . then perhaps a postmodern society is emerging which nurtures forms of identity different from, even opposite to those of modernity.^x

Even with such a short journey into the modern and postmodern discussion it is easy to note that there is a massive shift happening all around us. That shift is affecting every aspect of society. The church is no exception. Located in the middle of the campus of Loma Linda University is the University Church. The church has a membership of over 6,000 and has a significant ministry to the students. I asked senior pastor, Randy Roberts and young adult pastor, Tim Gillespie to describe their feelings and share their insights about how they see these changes affecting their ministries. Randy Roberts observed,

As I think about it, when I entered pastoral ministry, a number of things were true. I knew the questions (or a lot of them). I knew the answers (or at least most of them). Truth was something that could be proven, or at least demonstrated. We believed in right and wrong—and a lot of people, even if unreligious agreed with us. Relationships were important but doctrine was what ultimately mattered. Denominational loyalty was very high—one was *almost* a(n) _____ before one was a Christian. There was one way to worship; the others weren’t just wrong; they were bad. And life was black-and-white. As I re-read what I’ve written, I think, “Wow! The times, they are a’ changin.”^{xi}

Tim Gillespie's "re:Live" ministry is focused on the young adult population of our campus and community. "re:Live" has grown from an attendance of forty-five to over an average of 400 in one year. When asked the same question, Tim responded:

The largest difference I encounter in my ministry to the postmodern mind as opposed to the modern mind is the access to what most would call "truth." I believe, in a nutshell, the access has moved from a deductive approach to truth (empirical evidence, lists, statement of doctrines) to an inductive approach (the truth I see in you. . .). I don't believe this to be a bad thing, I believe this to be an almost pre-modern movement back toward a relational truth that we lost when Guttenberg invented the printing press and we lost the oral tradition of truth and values.^{xii}

Turn your attention to the following diagram. It is similar to our preceding illustration of modernism and postmodernism. This time, though, we have changed the labeling to reflect our focus on the church.

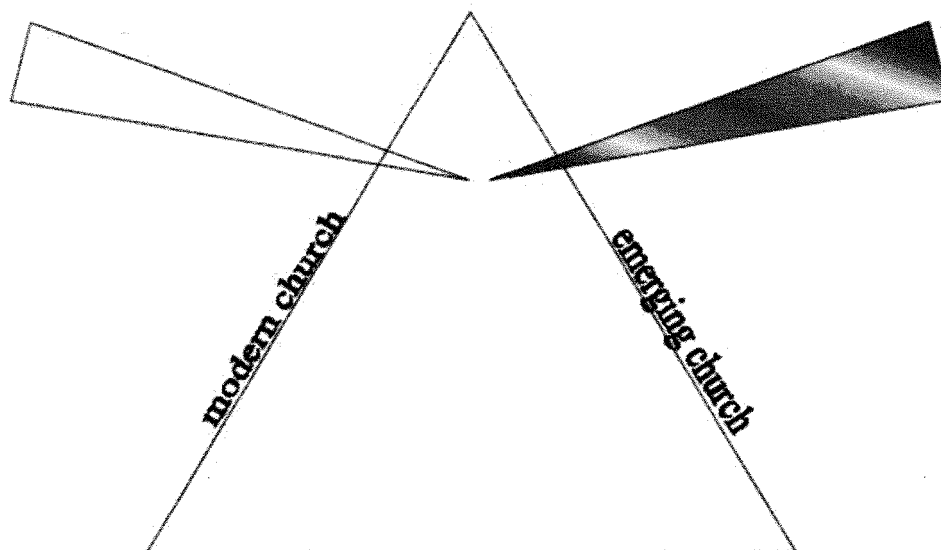


Figure 2.3. Modern and emerging church diagram

Note the differences in the diagram. In this illustration, one of the refractive indices represents the modern church. The other refractive index represents the emerging church. The white light represents the Gospel as it passes through them. The affirmation that the Gospel, the *kerygma* of Christianity, remains unchanged needs to be reiterated at this juncture. However, just like the aspects of the white light are changed by passing through an index plane of a prism, the Gospel is affected by what it passes through. That is to say, the Gospel's presentation and praxis is affected by the "planes" of modernism or postmodernism it is dispatched through. Just what those differences are will be the focus of the rest of our discussion. We will be making contrasts and comparisons on the following topics:^{xiii}

Table 1. The modern church and the emerging church

| Modern Church | Emerging Church |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Propositional | Experiential |
| Exclusive | Inclusive |
| Centered on Individual | Community |
| Attractional | Missional/Relational/Incarnational |

Propositional Versus Experiential

To the modern church faith is a propositional matter. What matters above all is correct orthodoxy—a correct understanding of Scripture. This is best embodied by systematic theology. Salvation becomes equational: God created us perfect. The separation of sin introduces imperfection. If we obey Him, we live. If we disobey (sin) we die. We all have sinned. We all will die. Jesus came and lived a sinless life and died in our place. His resurrection insured that we can have our sins forgiven and, thus, be united with God again. Now, I am not saying that orthodoxy or propositions are right or wrong.

I am making the point that the modern church is reflective of the society it existed in—one based on the primacy of science, reason and the empirical study of both. The systemization of theology and its primacy is reflective of this. Put more simply, what you know takes precedence over what you feel. Logic and/or rationality are dependable, reduplicatable and trustworthy. Feelings are mercurial and cannot be depended upon. Thus even worship experiences took on a didactic tenor. True, there are songs and music. But even the hymns were propositionally focused. You can trust Truth, but watch out for those feelings and emotions! You're better off to keep those to a minimum.

Whereas rationality was the mantra of the moderns, postmoderns strive for the experiential. "Postmoderns define the meaning of life in terms of the integrity of relationships and the intensity of experiences. For them, intensity, not clarity, is the dominant concern."^{xiv}

The emerging church is more experiential in nature. Accusations have been cast at the emerging church that it is all about fluff and not about substance. This is a wrong assertion. The emerging church is concerned about orthodoxy, but it is an orthodoxy that is discernable both with teaching and experience through faith. Peter Rollins addresses this very thing in his book, *How (Not) to Speak of God*:

Theology could be provisionally described as that which attempts to come to grips with this life-giving experience, to describe the source from which everything is suspended and from which our faith is born. In faith God is experienced as the absolute subject who grasps us, while in theology we set about reflecting upon this subject. Here the source of our desire is rendered into an (intellectual) object that we may reflect upon. In faith we are held, in theology we hold.^{xv}

Exclusive Versus Inclusive

When I was growing up in my hometown church, I remember the phraseology that my pastors and teachers would use when they would make reference to individuals who were not Christians. The term of reference was “the world.” Thus a dichotomy of “us” versus “the world” was created and firmly embedded in my mind. I would ask “What makes us ‘us’ and them ‘the world’?” Their answer usually ran something like this: “Well, because *we* have the truth and they don’t!” (emphasis mine). It wasn’t hard to grasp the unspoken message that “we” were the in crowd and “the world” was something to be suspect of if not downright afraid of. Another unspoken message (and to me it was the worst) was that “we” were somehow superior to everyone else. Maybe mine was an extreme experience. Perhaps other tribes of Christianity don’t make as much of an emphasis. Unfortunately, I don’t think that is the case. The modern church seems to have been plagued with exclusiveness. It seems that it goes part-and-parcel with the emphasis on having the “right” knowledge. We tend to get a country club attitude—members only.

I want to return, momentarily to the phrase “we have the truth.” From my innocent perspective I would look out at things that were transpiring in “the world” and notice that truly good things were being done or spoken of. I would ask how those who didn’t have the truth were somehow living and speaking the truth when we were supposed to be the only ones who had the truth! The answer that I received was “That’s easy! It really isn’t the truth! It is truth mixed with error and that’s the most dangerous kind!” Saying that another way would sound something like “Only the church (*our*

church) is the repository of all things good and true that come from God.” *That* is exclusivity.

The emerging church proposes an alternate pathway. It is the pathway of inclusion. This pathway would respond to my childhood church mentors by saying that all that is good comes from God. If there is any good happening in the world it is of God’s influence. Therefore, I can embrace that good and participate in it. The pathway of Christ is an inclusive one. Two passages from the New Testament exemplify this: “There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28) and “For God loved the *world* so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that *everyone* who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Centered on the Individual Versus Community

In the earlier description of modernism in secular terms, the concept of individualism was discussed. Modernism saw an extreme shift away from communal concepts to the individual taking center stage. It’s all about *my* rights and *my* desires and *my* pursuit of happiness. This modernistic focus invaded the church. Salvation became an individualistic affair. It’s all about my right relationship with God. The focus is on how God interacts with me on an individualistic basis. Praxis is about how I live my life. Prayer has a primary focus on how God can help me and provide for my needs.

The emerging church does not negate the individual. Rather, the emerging church adheres to the concept of *ubuntu*. There are many possible translations in English for *ubuntu*, including: “Humanity towards others,” “I am because we are,” “A person

‘becomes human’ through other persons,” “A person is a person because of other persons,” and “The belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity.”

Archbishop Desmond Tutu defined the concept:

A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed.^{xvi}

The Gospel is about the formation of a community of believers that live life based on Christ’s life and teachings. This concept of community speaks to the very heart of the postmodern condition. That condition is aptly described as follows:

These are children of divorce, many of whom have no church background. They are wary, mistrustful of institutions that have disappointed us all. They are fragmented. Skeptical of certainty. Life is terribly fragile and unpredictable. They long for deep relationships. They relate to individuals, to people, not some idea or ideal or institutional line. They want to see continuity, where they fit in in this confusing time . . . They process truth relationally, so if they see that a community really does stand for something and will be there for them when things are going great and when they suck, then they’ll commit to it.^{xvii}

Attractional Versus Missional/Relational/Incarnational

This section of our discussion deals with growth. In specifics, we are talking about how Christ’s community expands. The major mode of the modern church’s growth is best termed as attractional. Going back and briefly revisiting my childhood church experience paves the way for understanding the attractional mode. The modern church’s concept of “us” versus “them” provides the under girding for its concept of evangelism and outreach. The evangelism (a series of outreach, a program for the community, a seeker service, etc.) is done to “attract” unchurched people—“the world.” The goal is to

get them into a process of becoming just like members of the church that's doing the outreach. It is similar to the cavalry charging out of the fort at an opportune moment, rescuing a few lucky individuals and then hightailing it back into the safety of the fort.

We have tended to see mission as something we do in "heathen nations" and not on home base . . . So while the local church genuinely does forms of evangelism and outreach, because it measures effectiveness through numerical growth, better programming, and increase of plant and resources, it requires the attractional impulse to support it. The exchange is subtle but profound, and the net effect is to unwittingly block the outward-bound movement that is built into the Gospel.^{xviii}

To understand the emerging church's take on expanding Christ's community, we need to define three words: missional, relational and incarnational.

Missional

"A community of God's people that defines itself, and organizes its life around, its real purpose of being an agent of God's mission to the world."^{xix} The purpose of the church is not to be inwardly focused. The purpose of the church is to be outwardly focused. This is what Jesus was referring to when He called for His followers to be "light" and "salt." Both can't fulfill their purposes unless they are diffused in their respective mediums of intent—darkness and food. Jesus' whole intent for His community of believers is missional: "But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Relational

Christ's community of believers is based on relationships. The emergent church is set on building relationships with people from the perspective of a genuine love and concern for them versus seeking converts. Barna writes,

The new Revolution differs in that its primary impetus is not salvation among the unrepentant but the personal renewal and recommitment of believers. The dominant catalyst is people's desperation for a genuine relationship with God. The renewal of that relationship spurs believers to participate in spreading the Gospel.^{xx}

Incarnational

One of the great wonderments of the Gospel is that God became flesh. The incarnation of Jesus demonstrated God's desire that we would become one with Him again in all of its relational connotations. In response to Philip's request to see the Father, Jesus declared, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father!" In John 17:22, Jesus expresses the desire that His goal for us is to "be one as We are one." He wants us, His followers, to be in as connected a relationship with each other and with God as He, Jesus, is with His Father. "To love is to know God precisely because God is love. The emerging community, at its best, can teach us again that love must be the first word on our lips and also the last, and that we must seek to incarnate that sacred word in the world."^{xxi}

The Effect

The final aspect of our exploration is "The Effect." What effect does the medium of the modern church and the emerging conversation have on the praxis of the Kingdom life of the Gospel?

Let's go back to our illustration of a prism for one final time. When the white light source enters the prism, the denser medium slows down the light and, depending on the angle, either refracts and deflects it or reflects it. The same principle holds true when the Gospel is filtered through the modern church and the emerging church in relation to our postmodern times.

The sad facts seem to indicate that the modern church is having less and less of an impact on postmodern society. Research indicates that the church in America is only reaching about 8 to 12 percent of the total population.^{xxii} The numbers are even more dismal when one takes a look at what is happening in the European nations. By these indices alone, it would seem that the "refracting index" of the modern church is not penetrating the postmodern world with the light of the Gospel, but rather is being deflected off with a dwindling impact. The "answers and means" of the modern church seemingly are not addressing the needs and wants of postmoderns.

How is the emerging church faring? Perhaps we are too soon in the process to give a definitive answer. We do not have the track record of history and statistics to provide us with all of the information needed to be conclusive. But maybe, just maybe, we can discern the future of the emerging church from a comparison with our prism and the refracting process. When the white light hits the prism and the refracting indices are in proper alignment the white light is refracted into all of the colors of the rainbow. If what we have discovered about the distinctive principles of the emerging church are true and how they align themselves with the elements of the postmodern era, then the indicators would seem to point in the direction of success. The refracted rainbow

constituent colors would represent the diversity of God's methodologies and means of reaching this world with the Gospel of His love, presence and purpose.

Notes

ⁱ The definition and illustration can be located at [http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Prism+\(optics\)](http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Prism+(optics)).

ⁱⁱ I use the term "foundational structure" to mean the very essence, the *kerygma* of the Gospel. It is not used in the sense of how the Gospel is lived out and/or transmitted.

ⁱⁱⁱ The term "emerging conversation" is used as opposed to "emerging church." One could also use the term "emerging movement." The reason being is that, at present, there is not an official institutional "emergent church" structure. In a presentation given by Scot McKnight at the Fall Contemporary Issues Conference at the Westminster Theological Seminary, October 26-27, 2006, he made the following statement: "There is no such thing as the emerging 'church.' It is a movement or a conversation. It is a movement or a conversation-which Brian McLaren's and Tony Jones' favored term, and they after all are the leaders. To call it a 'church' on the title of (D. A. Carson's) book is to pretend that it is something like a denomination, which it isn't. The leaders are determined, right now, to prevent it becoming anything more than a loose association of those who want to explore conversation about the Christian faith and the Christian mission and the Christian praxis in this world of ours, and they want to explore that conversation with freedom and impunity when it comes to doctrine."

^{iv} Brian D. McLaren, *The Secret Message of Jesus* (Nashville, TN: W, 2006), 37.

^v The following discussion of the major aspects of modernism and postmodernism are only brief and representative of the whole. They are by no means meant to be exhaustive. That would be above and beyond the scope of this paper.

^{vi} Leonard I. Sweet and Brian D. McLaren, "A" *Is for Abductive: The Language of the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 199-200.

^{vii} Be this as it may, I have chosen to use the term *postmodern* and its derivatives throughout this book.

^{viii} James Curran, David Morley, and Valerie Walkerdin, eds., *Cultural Studies and Communications* (London: Arnold, 1996), 50.

^{ix} Ibid.

^x Meenakshi Durham and Douglas Kellner, eds., *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 612.

^{xi} Randy Roberts' comments were received by email on October 22, 2008.

^{xii} Tim Gillespie's comments were received by email on October 14, 2008..

^{xiii} The topics I have chosen are not meant to be exhaustive. They are however, to my mind, representational and therefore can enable us to get a good grasp of a wider discussion.

^{xiv} Sweet and McLaren, “*A*” *Is for Abductive*, 120.

^{xv} Peter Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete, 2006), 1-2.

^{xvi} *Wikipedia*, “Ubuntu,” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubuntu_\(ideology\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubuntu_(ideology)) (September 19, 2008).

^{xvii} Paul Wilkes, “Warehouse 242,” *Christian Century* 118, no. 11 (2001): 12.

^{xviii} Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2006), 130.

^{xix} *Ibid.*, 82.

^{xx} George Barna, *Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2005), 103.

^{xxi} Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 3.

^{xxii} George Barna at the Off the Map Conference, Seattle, WA, November 3-4, 2006.

CHAPTER 3

COMMUNICATING THE GOSPEL

What is it about a fire in the fireplace or logs burning in the fire ring of a campsite that mesmerizes us as we peer into it? Is it the warmth that radiates out and warms us as we huddle nearby? Is it the way in which it banishes the darkness with its light? Or is it the way that the flames dance and writhe in the darkness? The flaming of a fire is transfixing. It has mystery. It calls to something at the core of us, something deep within the hidden flow of our lives. It arrests our attention. The apostle John wrote,

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. (1 John 1:5-7)

Jesus subsequently calls us to be light:

You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father. (Matthew 5: 14-16)

In these passages we notice the metaphor of light describing: (1) What God is like; (2) How we should live; and (3) How we live and what we do are means by which others understand the Gospel.¹ The Gospel is not a set of stagnant doctrines or fossilized formulas and creeds. The Gospel is the story of an Incarnate Christ and His lived-out relationships with the people and the cultures around Him. It is the story of how God's

Kingdom is re-established and repopulated on this earth in anticipation of His Second Coming. It is the imperative for us to share the mission and message of Christ with the rest of the inhabitants of earth who haven't heard them.

As we move further along on our journey of understanding and discovery, it does not take long until we bump into the following questions—"We have encountered the Gospel in our lives, but how and where do we share it and live it? What are the differences, if any, between how evangelism—the sharing of the Gospel—is effectively engaged in a modern context and a postmodern² context? Is it a case of "either/or" or are there alternative ways of sharing the Gospel?

When was the last time you worried about how you would light up a dark room? Unless there was a power outage in your area, probably not lately! It is one of those things we assume will happen without thinking about it. Just a flip of a switch or a push of a button floods and our space is flooded with light. In the days before electricity, fire was the only means to light up the darkness beyond sunlight or moonlight. It used to be quite a job to light a fire—caring around a glowing ember, rubbing two sticks together, etc. Those days were done away with by the modern marvel called a match! The dynamics of how a match works are a small miracle we take for granted.

To initiate and sustain combustion, three things are needed: fuel, oxygen, and heat. These three components make up what is known as the **fire triangle**. Dragging a match across a rough surface will generate heat due to friction. If the match moves fast enough, friction will generate enough heat and the match will ignite.³

The match head and wooden stick provide the fuel. The friction of the sandpaper on a book of matches provides the heat. The oxygen in the air provides the sustenance. It

is within the definition of the “fire triangle” that we find our concepts and elements that will form our framework of discussion: fuel + oxygen + heat = fire.

The Fire Triangle: Fuel

Fuel is defined as, “1. combustible matter used to maintain fire . . . in order to create heat or power, 2. something that gives nourishment; food, 3. an energy source, 4. something that sustains or encourages.”⁴

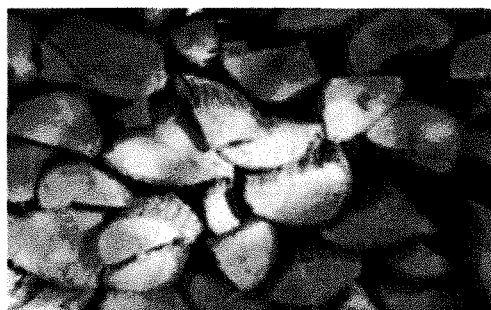


Figure 3.1. Fuel

If, in our previous analogy, fire represents the Gospel, then the first portion of the “fire triangle”—fuel—will be used to represent the Gospel narrative as presented in Scripture and its preeminent usage in evangelism during the modern era. What were some of the prominent characteristics of evangelism during this time period?

Shane Hipps shares a helpful diagram, metaphor and discussion of how knowledge is acquired in the modern era that helps us to understand the form and formula of modern evangelism.⁵

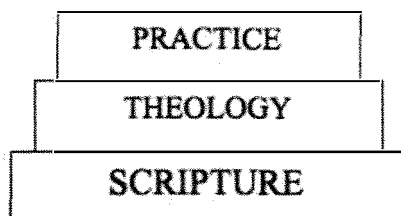


Figure 3.2. Modern evangelism

The modern approach to knowledge, known as *foundationalism*, was conceived during the Enlightenment. In this understanding all truth is derived from a single foundation. Knowledge is then added on top of this foundation. Knowledge builds in one direction, from the foundation to the top floor. It is a one-way, linear, sequential metaphor in which the foundation determines everything above it.⁶

Following Hippias' analogy, Scripture, and the propositions developed from them, provides the foundation of evangelism in the modern era. Everything else devolves from this.

George Hunter, in his book entitled, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, makes a distinction between the Celtic way of evangelism and the Roman model that gives another insight into this linear approach.⁷ He refers to the Roman model as following a three phase approach: 1) Present the Christian message; 2) Invite them to decide to believe in Christ and become Christians; and 3) If they decide positively, welcome them into the church and its fellowship. Hunter goes on to say, "The Roman model seems very logical to us because most American evangelicals are scripted by it! We explain the Gospel, they accept Christ, then we welcome them into the church! Presentation, decision, assimilation. What could be more logical than that?"⁸ Hunter's words point to some overt characteristics of modern evangelism. Its emphasis is on left brain activity

and can be summed up in the following categories: propositional; exclusive; centered on individualism; and attractional.

In modern evangelism, the Gospel is propositional in nature. It is presented in a formulaic fashion. God created us perfect and sinless. Man sinned. The wages of sin is death. Jesus came and lived a sinless life (that we couldn't live) and died in our place (what should have happened to us). He rose from the dead and now we can have eternal life. To get eternal life, we must confess and repent of our sins and accept His Lordship of our lives. If we do this, then we are converted and saved. It is up to me and God. It is logical and sequential. It is verifiable—I can pinpoint the moment of conversion. Of primary importance is the propositional theology.

In addition to its propositional nature, modern evangelism is exclusive. Simply put, if a person hears the propositional presentation and accepts it, they are “in” and can join the Christian community. If they reject it, they are “out.” There is an easily discernable line of demarcation between Christians and those who are not.

Evangelism is viewed as a salvific process that is focused on the individual. The individual is presented with the doctrinal truth. The individual makes the decision, after weighing the evidence, as to whether to accept or reject the Gospel. The individual follows the prescribed pathway of conversion.

There is a preferred method of evangelizing moderns that has been termed attractional evangelism. Let's take a moment and review the traditional methodology of an “evangelistic crusade.” Periodically, a church would plan to do “outreach” to the community. They would schedule a professional evangelist to come to town to hold

meetings. They would advertise the meetings by various methods: newspapers, billboards, advertisements, flyers, door-to-door, and word of mouth. The meetings would be held for a proscribed period of time sufficient to cover the propositional points of the host church. The evangelist would persuasively preach on these points.

Attendees would be given an opportunity (or many opportunities) to follow the conversion formula and accept the propositional points. Then they would be ushered into church membership—one of “us” and, in so doing, ushered out of the status of being part of “the world.” At this point, the campaign is done, evangelism is accomplished, the Gospel has been shared and all can go back to normal until the next round of “outreach” is scheduled. In *Reimagining Evangelism*, author Rick Richardson describes this method of outreach as the “Close the Deal” form of evangelism:

The paradigm that dominated much twentieth-century evangelism might be called “Evangelism as Closing the Deal on a Sales Call.” Many Christians think they have to dump their content on someone and then close the deal, or else they haven’t really shared their faith. This basic paradigm of evangelism as individuals seeking to make the close on a sales call permeates the evangelical consciousness. Our image of the evangelist is the image of a spiritual salesman.⁹

Modern evangelism has been effective. Millions around the world have been converted and given their lives and allegiance to Christ and His Kingdom. Modern evangelism has focused on and highlighted the primacy of Scripture as a definer of truth and a guide for the life of an individual and the church community as a whole. But modern evangelism in its praxis has some inherent issues. Hipps encapsulates these issues in the following quote:

When we claim the Gospel message is unchanging, we risk boasting of a kind of omniscience in which we presume to know the totality of God’s inexhaustible

mysteries. We presume to have discovered the one simple and unchanging message for all times and places. In this view, the Holy Spirit, who was sent to teach us truth, becomes little more than a dashboard ornament, for we already know all the truth we need. In this view, the Gospel story (if there is one) is of no consequence; all that matters is static proposition.¹⁰

To the modern era, learning truth, understanding truth and accepting truth was enough. The problem is that times have changed and a new era has begun. That era is the postmodern era. Sam Leonor is the campus pastor for La Sierra University which is a Christian undergraduate liberal arts campus located in California. After almost ten years in this ministerial setting he has been a front row observer of the changes that are transpiring. Sam observes,

From my experience working with College students, there have been three significant developments: 1. They are more ecumenical. That is, they don't see the need for denominational loyalty; 2. They are less willing to make exclusive claims about Christianity. They are uncomfortable with language that explains their faith as better," "above others," etc. Along with this I have seen an interest in other religions. 3. They are more open to discussions about spirituality. They are not measured or careful about this topic. They are very eager to discuss spiritual issues and how they affect their lives.

With the dawn of a new era come new questions: Is the Gospel understanding and the evangelistic praxis of the modern era effective and is it enough to meet the needs of the postmodern era? If not, what are those needs and how can we proficiently address the Gospel to the emerging culture?

The Fire Triangle: Oxygen

Oxygen is defined as "a colorless, odorless, gaseous element constituting about one-fifth of the volume of the atmosphere and present in a combined state in nature. It is the supporter of combustion in air."¹¹



Figure 3.3. Oxygen

In the description of the fire triangle, the second necessary component for combustion is oxygen. The fuel provides the material to burn. Oxygen provides the means for the intensity of the flame or whether or not there will be a flame at all. The greater the amount of oxygen, the hotter and brighter the flame. You can have all the fuel that you need. You can have the highest quality of fuel available. However, if you do not have oxygen it is not going to burn. To continue our analogy, if fuel represents the Gospel narrative as presented in Scripture and its preeminent usage in evangelism during the modern era, then oxygen represents how the Gospel and its evangelization transpire in the postmodern era.

We have already noted that we live in a period of transition. The world in general, and the society in which we preside in particular, is in the cusp of moving from the modern era to the postmodern era or has already made the transition. How far along into that transition and the delineation of what we are transitioning into are under current discussion and study. Suffice it to say that we *are* transitioning and we are experiencing transformations in all aspects of life. This transitory state of affairs is also evident in

evangelism. Rick Richardson takes note of this and encapsulates its elements into three key transformations:

First, people today are looking for truth that is experiential, for communities in which faith is lived out and for spiritual experiences that are tangible and real. *So experience comes before explanation.*

Second, people today are looking for a safe and accepting community in which to work out their identity. *So belonging comes before believing.*

Third, the battle for allegiance today is a battle for people's spiritual and moral imagination. *So image comes before word.*¹²

Even a casual reading of this quotation from Richardson reveals a profound change in the way people think and feel and process in the emerging culture. Put simply, there has been a tectonic shift from left brained dominance to right brained dominance. Our society also developed a great hunger for depth in interpersonal relationships and the building and establishing of community. Advances in technology, such as the internet and in the area of communications, have connected the citizens of the world as never before. We can have instantaneous conversations in several mediums all going on at the same time!

Yet, with all of this connectedness at our fingertips, more and more people are feeling lonely and isolated. We've lost community! Knowing our neighbors is a thing of the past. We have become disconnected, and Author Leonard Sweet observes:

When compared to as recently as the 1980's, USAmericans have fewer relationships and less intimate friendships outside the family than they used to. That's one reason family members are becoming more important, and outside friends less so. That's also the big reason for the burgeoning relationship industries of counselors, coaches, therapists, trainers . . . a flotilla of "paid" friends.¹³

The extent of personal isolation is underscored by the phrase “paid friends.” The “fuel” of modern era traditional propositional evangelism remains unlit because there is no “oxygen” of community and relationship to breath life into it. To be sure, there was a communal aspect to modern evangelism, but it was tangential and not intentional. In some ways, it piggy-backed on the societal community of the day. There were still neighborhoods that were neighborhoods. People lived most, if not all, of their lives in the same home. They started families, raised their children and retired in the same neighborhood. There was continuity and there was community. That community was carried over into the neighborhood church.

Sweet points out that “Churches doubled as community centers, town meeting halls, centers for disseminating news, places of community celebrations and bases of operation during times of emergency . . . but for the most part, the church has lost its reputation for supporting and building the community.”¹⁴ Therefore, the communal aspect of modern churches was somewhat a byproduct versus a focused effort. When the transformation to the emerging culture came community went. Promulgation of propositional truth was left.

Continuing his thought, Sweet says, “But the church has divested itself of the connection business in order to master the principle business, the proposition business, and the being-right business. Its school of thought is now a school of ought. The church is by and large no longer in the relationship business.”¹⁵ The results are reflective and staggering. Church membership is on the decline. Church attendance is dissipating. General estimates are that only 8 to 12 percent of the population of the United States of

America is involved in church.¹⁶ If we look at the statistics for European nations, the numbers drop precipitously.

There needs to be a breath of new life to light the fuel again. We need oxygen. What does the “oxygen” of emerging evangelism look like? To answer that question we will first look at and discuss a diagram. Then we will do a comparison of modern evangelism and postmodern evangelism.

Previously, we referred to a diagram produced by Shane Hipps. We now return to a second diagram of his followed by his delineation of its metaphorical meaning.¹⁷

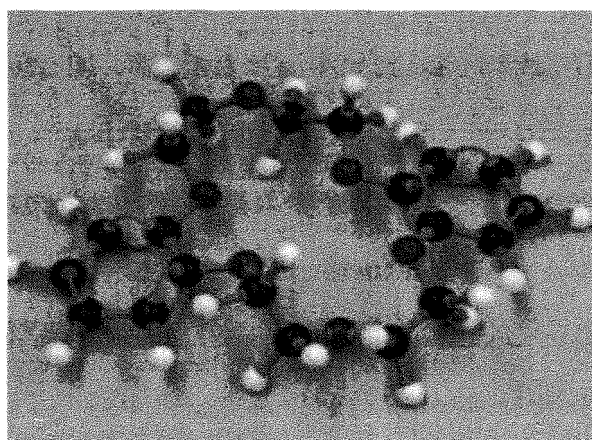


Figure 3.4. Web of molecules

Hipps writes:

The postmodern approach to knowledge, known as the *web of belief*, was developed by Willard V. Quine in 1970. In this conception, knowledge is conditioned both by our experience and by truth claims. These truth claims have multiple interconnections with each other. They form a web bound by, but not rooted in, experience. There is no foundation; instead the legitimacy of a web is determined by its coherence. More interconnections mean a more coherent belief system. It is a *two-way* dialogue in which experience shapes belief and belief shapes experience.¹⁸

Whereas in the modern era belief is individual and primary, in the postmodern era “experience shapes belief and belief shapes experience.” With this insight, how does evangelism in the emerging culture function and what are its parameters in comparison with the modern era? For the sake of clarity and conciseness in making comparisons between modern and postmodern society, we will employ the subheadings developed by author, Rick Richardson.¹⁹

Collaboration Versus Activism

Activism refers to the type of outreach that we have already outlined at length in our discussion of the traditional pattern of an evangelistic crusade. This form followed a kind of “go and conquer and retrieve” mentality. Collaboration refers to the community of Christ engaged in partnership with God, seeking where He is already at work and collaborating with Him. It is following in the natural flow of our lives and relationships and interactions with individuals in the every day-ness of our lives. It is about living out our love relationship with God through our love relationship with others. As Richardson puts it, “Evangelism could become an adventure in detection rather than a burden of making it all happen.”²⁰

Community Versus Individual

In the modern era, the focus was on the individual and their interaction and response to the Gospel presented through evangelistic means. The statement, “Don’t look at the church. Look at Jesus” was often used by pastors (I must confess that I was one of them). The usage of this statement was to redirect the focus of an unchurched person

away from the faults and foibles of the local church community and have them focus on the perfection and person of Jesus. The unspoken message was that what happened in the church among its members isn't what mattered. What mattered was Jesus and your individual relationship with Him.

This statement is both true and false. It is true in the sense that our salvation only comes through Christ. He is our model and example. It is false in the sense that Christ desired the Gospel to be lived out and shared in the context of His Kingdom Community called the Church. And that is where the focus of the emerging culture is. Something is real and has authority and validity as it is lived out in community. Postmoderns want to belong. They seek community. Richardson writes,

People come to Christ primarily in the context of community. Belonging comes before believing. Evangelism is about helping people belong so that they can come to believe. So our communities need to be places where people can connect before they have to commit.²¹

Friendship Versus Agenda

Under the modern era paradigm of evangelism, an unchurched person was more of a hunting trophy. The focus was to bag as many "trophies" as possible. Give the message, make the pitch and seal the deal. In the emerging culture, friendship is the key to conversion. It is a friendship that stems from a genuine desire for relationship without mixed motives or hidden agendas. "Good evangelism is the process of being friendly without discrimination and influencing all of one's friends toward better living, through good deeds and good conversations."²²

Story Versus Dogma

We don't live and breathe dogma. We live out our lives in a succession of experiences. Each experience is a story within the meta-story of our life. And, like the ever expanding ripples radiating out from a raindrop in a pond, our story intertwines with the stories of all those around us. We are stories. The emerging culture is not swayed by propositions. They are moved by stories and experiences. Sweet writes:

Living in one's head is no longer a deep life but a shallow life. The hunger of the soul is for living in one's heart as much as living in one's head. People don't want staged experiences; they hunger (and thirst) for the spontaneity of authentic experience in this time of transition. Mass-produced and prefabricated don't cut it. We're looking for authentic experiences of the moment.²³

The emerging culture is searching for an experiential reality of God. They want to know His truths inhaling the oxygen of life lived through interaction with others. They want to know the story and how they become a part of it.

Good News About God's Kingdom Versus Good News About the Afterlife

In the modern era, the message of evangelism tended to be based on what you were—*lost*; how to get out of your predicament—*conversion*; and how to hang on until Christ's Second Coming at which point Christ's Kingdom would *finally* be established. The "pie in the sky by-and-by" was the proverbial carrot attached to the stick. But that was a truncated part of Christ's message. Jesus, Himself, made the declaration that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. In fact, it was established with His incarnation. He came to establish a community that would be His incarnation,²⁴ so to speak, which would seek to establish His Kingdom on earth (albeit in partiality) with its ultimate realization at His

return at the end of the age. The establishment of that kingdom evidenced itself by its citizens seeking to draw people back into an intimate relationship with God; to address the inequities and injustices of the world; to make a difference in the societies in which they lived; to be the “salt” and “light” of Jesus’ parables. This is the new paradigm of the postmodern.

Journey Versus Event

Under modern era evangelism, conversion was pushed to draw lines. It was a divining rod that enabled the church to determine who was saved and who wasn’t or who was in and who was out. But in postmodern evangelism conversion isn’t an event, but rather a process.

The new model, a model based on the image of journey, sees all of us as moving either toward the goal or away from the goal. If the goal is to be a wholehearted follower of Jesus, then we are at different points along the way. But the crucial question is whether we are moving toward the center and beginning to follow in the footsteps of the Leader.²⁵

This statement by Richardson alludes to a substantial shift in the concept of conversion. Rather than it being a one-time event that we look back on as an anchor point, there are several “conversions” throughout an individual’s lifetime. Our relationship and experience with God includes shifts and movement closer to and farther away and constant realignment to the “goal.” Perhaps a cumulative thought for this section of our conversation can be summed up by the following quote in *Reimagining Evangelism*:

If regular folks like us are filled with the Spirit and led by the Spirit and pursue conversations with spiritual companions, we may be used by God to change the

face of the church and contribute much toward the redemption of people and the transformation of society.²⁶

The Fire Triangle: Heat

Heat is defined as, “1. the state of the body perceived as having or generating a relatively high degree of warmth, 2. the condition or quality of being hot, 3. the degree of hotness; temperature, 4. the sensation of warmth or hotness, 5. a bodily temperature higher than normal.”²⁷

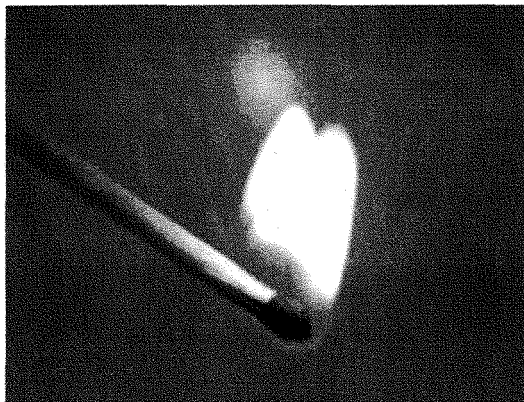


Figure 3.5. Heat

Returning once more to our fire triangle analogy, there is one aspect of the triangle that is missing from our discussion. We have the “fuel.” We have the “oxygen.” Yet, even though we have these absolutely essential components, we will not have fire until we obtain the third part of the fire triangle—“heat.” And how do we obtain the heat? All that is needed is a match and motion. “Dragging the match across the rough surface will generate heat due to friction. If the match moves fast enough, friction will generate enough heat and the match will ignite.”²⁸

The modern era evangelists promulgate Scripture and propositions. The postmodern evangelists proffer community and relationship. Is it a question of either or? Let me ask the question in another way. Is it a question of using only our left brain or right brain? A choice of one over the other is not suitable because it would leave us brain damaged! We would be parsing the infinite possibilities of a brain united! The key, to me, lies in the apostle, John's declaration regarding Jesus that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

Here is my application. The Word is the scriptural truth and revelation of Christ and the Gospel. Thus our analogy to fuel. The flesh is Christ coming to this earth to live in relationship with us and to establish the parameters of His Kingdom Community. Thus our analogy to oxygen. It is in the statement that Jesus came and "dwelt among us" that we derive our analogy to heat. We have seen that, for us to have the Word alone, leads us to a sterile intellectual assent to the Gospel. On the other hand, for us to make the primary focus our interaction in community the end all, we develop a community without structure, guidance and purpose. It will not be a Gospel community without the Gospel.

Even if we have the combination of the "Word" and the "flesh" there is no kingdom life without the "dwelling" which is the "heat" that fires things up. The scriptural basis for this statement plays itself out in the story of Pentecost. Christ had risen from the dead. He had ascended to heaven. The community of believers were gathered together in the upper room waiting for the realization of Jesus' last words "But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people

about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:6-7). And then it happened! The Holy Spirit descended upon them.

The following description is given in Acts 2:3-4: “Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit” (emphasis mine). Please indulge my analogy to make my point. When the “fuel” of the truth of Scripture was dragged across the “hearts” of the community of believers and received the “oxygen” of their realization and acceptance the “heat” of the Holy Spirit made the experience of Christ’s Kingdom burst into the “flame” of realization and reality.

This Gospel community is one of connection. Both as individuals and as a whole, community citizens are intimately connected to God through experience and His Word which guides and sustains them. They are also intimately connected and experience life with each other. They join the individual story of their life with the community stories of each other as chapters in the Story of God:

People today understand that “story” is a more fundamental category than “proposition” though both are needed. Sometimes Christians’ focus on dogma instead of story has resulted in divorcing our truth from the story that gives our truth its meaning, plausibility and power. We must recover our own stories, and God’s Big Story, and connect them to the stories of people we love and are reaching out to. Our story. God’s story. Their story.²⁹

I finish with a quotation from an author that wrote these words over one hundred years ago. Their relevance and applicability to our subject matter are self-evident:

Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, “Follow Me.”

There is need of coming close to the people by personal effort. If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen. The poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing and the bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counseled. We are to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice. Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, the power of the love of God, this work will not, cannot, be without fruit.³⁰

Notes

¹ When the term "the gospel" is used throughout this essay, it is with the following definition in mind taken from Everett F. Harrison, ed., *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985): "These two sources combine to set forth one common apostolic gospel. In briefest outline, this message contained: 1) A historical proclamation of the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus, set forth as the fulfillment of prophecy and involving man's responsibility; 2) A theological evaluation of the person of Jesus as both Lord and Christ; 3) A summons to repent and receive the forgiveness of sins."

² Note: throughout the book the terms "postmodern" and "emerging culture" will be used interchangeably.

³ This definition of fire was provided on the Nova website: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/fireworks/fire_match2.html.

⁴ Dictionary.com, s.v. "fuel," <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/fuel> (accessed: April 18, 2007).

⁵ Shane Hipps, *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture: How Media Shapes Faith, the Gospel, and Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 69.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ George G. Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West Again* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2000), 53.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Rick Richardson, *Reimagining Evangelism: Inviting Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 17.

¹⁰ Hipps, *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture*, 90.

¹¹ Dictionary.com, s.v. "oxygen," <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/oxygen> (accessed: April 18, 2007).

¹² Rick Richardson, *Evangelism Outside the Box: New Ways to Help People Experience the Good News* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 51-52.

144. ¹³ Leonard I. Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2007), 144.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., 142.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., 144.
- ¹⁶ George Barna, Off the Map Conference, Seattle, WA, November 3-4, 2006.
- ¹⁷ Hipps, *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture*, 69.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Richardson, *Reimagining Evangelism: Inviting Friends on a Spiritual Journey*, 26-27. I will be using his subheadings and including my own wording and interpretations of what they delineate.
- ²⁰ Ibid., 27.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Brian D. McLaren, *More Ready Than You Realize: Evangelism as Dance in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 15.
- ²³ Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks*, 37.
- ²⁴ This concept is based on 2 Corinthians 5:19-20.
- ²⁵ Richardson, *Reimagining Evangelism*, 29.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 19.
- ²⁷ Dictionary.com, s.v. "heat," <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/heat> (accessed: April 18, 2007).
- ²⁸ This definition of fire was provided on the Nova website: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/fireworks/fire_match2.html (April 19, 2007).
- ²⁹ Richardson, *Reimagining Evangelism*, 87.
- ³⁰ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Review and Herald, 1942), 142-144.

CHAPTER 4

BECOMING A CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNITY

My seminary training took place in the mid-1980s. During that time, we were taught the following methodology for Bible studies. The process began with the underlying assumption that the persons we were going to be studying with were either Christians who needed to understand the Bible better, Christians who had fallen from faith or individuals that knew about Christianity but had never made the commitment. So, the first step was to show them the Bible and demonstrate, by the usage of appropriate proof texting, that the Scriptures declare that they are the Word of God and, therefore, are normative and directive for their lives. Now accept and follow. But something has happened to the culture I find myself in. The United States has changed from modern homogeneity to postmodern emerging. And with that transformation, so too, must our methodology be transformed. Peter S. Adler writes,

For the first time in the history of the world, a patchwork of technology and organization has made possible simultaneous interpersonal and intercultural communication. Innovations and refinements of innovations . . . have brought people everywhere into potential contact. . . . The impact is enormous. Human connections through communication have made possible the interchange of goods, products and services as well as the more significant exchange of thoughts and ideas. Accompanying the growth of human communication has been the erosion of barriers that have, throughout history, geographically, linguistically, and culturally separated people. As Harold Lasswell once suggested, "The technological revolution as it affects mass media has reached a limit that is subject only to innovations that would substantially modify our basic perspectives of one another and of man's place in the cosmos." It is possible that the emergence of the multicultural person is just such an innovation.¹

Now, I invite you to journey ahead with me to the year 1998. I am the Campus Chaplain and an Adjunct Associate Professor of the School of Religion for Loma Linda University. I am about to teach my first class on Christian Beliefs. As the class was about to begin, I surveyed the variety of students that sat before me. Racially, the spectrum of the rainbow was present. There were literally individuals who hailed from every continent except Antarctica. The students were a plethora of cultural diversity, socio-economic status and even generational variation. To complete the scenario, there was a polyglot of religious representations including Protestant, Catholic, Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Latter-day Saints, and Jehovah Witnesses. Add to those, for good measure, agnostic and atheistic students.

The challenge that presented itself to me became rapidly self-evident: How could I communicate Christian beliefs in a coherent and winning manner to such a cross-cultural crowd? How could we establish a connectedness with each other? How could we develop into a classroom community of fellow travelers on our corporate spiritual journey? This is not a trivial matter of creating “warm fuzzies” and “spiritual buddies.”

The magnitude of this quest is underscored in the following words by Jonathan Sacks:

The question addressed . . . a fateful one in an age threatened by the clash of civilizations—is whether religions can become a force for peace rather than a source of conflict. That depends, in turn, on how different faiths and cultures make space for “the other,” the one who is not like us, whose race, color or creed is different from ours. Do we see the other as a threat to our beliefs and way of life, or as an enrichment of the collective heritage of mankind [*sic*]?²

Evoking the Kingdom

In the book of Genesis, we find the story of Noah and the Flood. After the Flood had subsided, God sought to impart to Noah, his family and subsequent generations, an understanding of who He was, what His relationship with them would be and how they should relate to each other. So God established a covenant. “The word [covenant] is used with reference to God's revelation of himself in the way of promise or of favor to men. Thus God’s promise to Noah after the Flood is called a covenant.”³ As a symbol of that covenant, God chose a rainbow: “And God said, ‘I am giving you a sign as evidence of my eternal covenant with you and all living creatures. I have placed my rainbow in the clouds. It is the sign of my permanent promise to you and to all the earth’” (Gen. 9:12-13).



Figure 4.1. Rainbow

What applicability does the choice of a rainbow have? Perhaps if we look at the physical properties of a rainbow the answer will become evident. What is a rainbow and how is it created?

[A rainbow is a] series of concentric colored arcs that may be seen when light from a distant source—most commonly the Sun—falls upon a collection of water drops—as in rain, spray, or fog. The rainbow is observed in the direction opposite to the Sun. The colored rays of the rainbow are caused by the refraction and internal reflection of light rays that enter the raindrops, each color being bent through a slightly different angle. Hence, the composite colors of the incident light will be separated upon emerging from the drop.⁴

With the allowance of some literary license, let me make the following spiritual applications of this physical phenomenon. Spiritually applied, the “Sun” represents God.

“But for you who fear my name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his wings. And you will go free, leaping with joy like calves let out to pasture” (Mal. 4:2).

The “light” is the Gospel, the story of Christ and His interaction with humanity. This concept is prominently proclaimed by Jesus, Himself in the following passages:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life . . . Their judgment is based on this fact: the light from heaven came into the world, but they loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. (John 13:16-19)

Jesus said to the people, “I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won’t be stumbling through the darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life.” (John 8:12)

The “raindrop” that falls to the earth is the Incarnation of Jesus. The Apostle Paul represents this thought in Christ’s descending through the path of humility and into the experience of humanity:

Your attitude should be the same that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form. And in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal’s death on a cross. (Phil. 2:5-8)

The subsequent spectral diffusion of light rays in the “rainbow” represents His Kingdom, declared in the commissioning and inclusiveness of the Gospel and evidenced in the spectral diversity of its citizens:

You are the light of the world—like a city on a mountain, glowing in the night for all to see. Don’t hide your light under a basket! Instead, put it on a stand and let it shine for all. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that *everyone* will praise your heavenly Father.” (Matt. 5:14-16, emphasis mine)

Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and *make disciples of all the nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” (Matt. 28:18-20 emphasis mine)

It is in this passage, commonly called The Great Commission, that we get an astonishing glimpse at the vista of Jesus’ inclusiveness and the breadth of the diversity of His Kingdom’s citizenry. Throughout His ministry, Jesus practiced what He preached (often to the disdain and chagrin of His disciples, the religious leaders and the society of His day).⁵ Paul encapsulates the Kingdom’s inclusiveness:

For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God’s promise to Abraham belongs to you. (Gal. 3:26-29)

Prior to Jesus’ establishment of His Kingdom, all other kingdoms followed the same basic pattern or structure. These kingdoms were determined by specificity of race, ethnicity, culture, and clan. These kingdoms’ physical boundaries were determined by political prowess and military might and, in some instances, by monetary muscle. But the

Kingdom of Heaven is radically different. It exceeds *all* boundaries. It transcends *all* ethnic, racial, and national distinctions. It flourishes in its diversity and inclusiveness.

Tucked away in the Old Testament story of the Tower of Babel, found in the book of Genesis, we discover the reality of the world we find ourselves in and the inkling of what God has in mind for us and the Kingdom. There we find that humanity has turned their focus from God to themselves. Instead of trusting the covenant made by God with Noah, instead of depending on God for their salvation, they turned to themselves. They sought to “build a great city with a tower that reaches to the skies—a monument to our greatness! This will bring us together and keep us from scattering all over the world” (Gen. 11:4). They rebelled against God. They laid out the framework for an alien kingdom paradigm. They would have succeeded—except God took action:

But the LORD came down to look at the city and the tower the people were building. “Look!” he said. “The people are united, and they all speak the same language. After this, nothing they set out to do will be impossible for them! Come, let’s go down and confuse the people with different languages. *Then they won’t be able to understand each other.*” In that way, the LORD scattered them all over the world, and they stopped building the city. (Gen. 11:5-8, emphasis mine)

The diffusion of languages crushed the aspirations of a humanistic universal empire. Through sin and in the multiplicity of languages, diversity bred exclusivity. But God’s original desires and plans for humanity are not thwarted. Through the cross, the language of the Gospel becomes the embrace of diversity and the communal glue of the Kingdom of Heaven. God’s “universal language of love” becomes the lingua franca of His people—His kingdom built of “living stones” made a reality through the gift of His Son and the vivifying power of His Spirit. Jesus made no secret of His aspirations for His

followers and His Kingdom. His desires become readily discernable in the following passage from the Gospel of John:

Just as you [Father] sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world. And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth. I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. (John 17:18-21)

In His Kingdom, Jesus wants inclusiveness. He embraces diversity. He calls for us to tear down the dividing walls of race, ethnicity, culture, socio-economic biases and gender discrimination. He wants us to reach past generational differences. Christ's imperative is clear. But, in this world of ever-increasing tribal fragmentation, how do we communicate Christ's Kingdom dynamics in a coherent manner? How can we establish a connectedness? How can we develop community?

Embracing Diversity

In my mind, the realization of Christ's Kingdom of inclusion begins with the embracing of the rainbow principles of Scripture previously discussed. The Gospel is God's message in verity. Through His Incarnation and how Christ approached individuals, the Gospel speaks to the heart and need of diversity. The refracted rainbow constituent colors would represent the multiplicity of God's methods and means of reaching this world and its cross-cultural diversity with the Gospel of His love, presence and purpose. And now, through us His followers, He seeks to be incarnate in our actions and relationships.

How do we communicate Christ's Kingdom dynamics in a coherent manner? It is by embracing the diversity that we find ourselves in. If we are to be effectively transformational for Christ's Kingdom in our culture and the cultures that we interface with, we must understand the concept of globalization. Globalization can be defined as the worldwide integration of economic, cultural, political, religious, and social systems.

Several years ago, I was on an international flight to India. During the journey, we were treated to the latest movie from the indigenous Indian film industry of Bollywood. It was a love story set in an historical period of India's past. Suddenly, in the midst of a conversation between the two lovers, the screen erupted into a musical dance routine featuring contemporary hip-hop dance routines and rap music! Upon arrival in New Delhi, I was confronted with the pervasiveness of globalization. All around I could see the divergence of culture. On one hand, you had the traditional aspects of dress, demeanor, and evidences of everyday living—traditional restaurants, shops, etc. Juxtaposed to this were young people dressed in the latest fashions from western society, listening to contemporary music and dining in western style restaurants such as Dominoes Pizza and sipping lattes at Starbucks!

We do not need to travel internationally to witness this phenomenon. It exists all around us. Just a cursory glance reveals that our entertainment is global as evidenced in the merging of various genres of music and art. Our foods are international—Asian-Californian cuisine restaurants, Caribbean-Mexican restaurants, and others. Our economies are inextricably intertwined as evidenced by the recent economic crises

triggered by the sub-prime woes of the United States pummeling investment markets in Europe, Asia, and worldwide.

We no longer live in a community of physical and cultural isolation. We live in a global community of interconnectedness. As the community of Christ, we must embrace this new reality. Better still, we need to realize that this is not just a happenstance, but an opportunity for us to grab hold of. This viewpoint is illustrated by the words of Bob Robertson, Jr.:

Globalization is not the result of technology and development that is emerging, but the end result of God's plan for the world and nations all along. This is not a test. This is not a phase. This is the ultimate connectedness that God has planned for the world since the first day of creation. Technology and development are only the means that God established long ago to connect us because it is a global faith.⁶

Not just intercontinental or intercommunity, but, in the emerging culture, we live in a world that is inter-neighborhood, inter-workplace, inter-school, inter—
EVERYWHERE!

This truth is another aspect of the changes that have engulfed our planet that we must address. Our world has become “flat.” Thomas L. Friedman defines the “flatness” of our world as follows:

[Flat] means equalizing, because the flattening forces are empowering more and more individuals today to reach farther, faster, deeper, and cheaper than ever before, and that is equalizing power—and equalizing opportunity, by giving so many more people the tools and ability to connect, compete, and collaborate.⁷

If we are to be effectively transformational for Christ's Kingdom in our culture and the cultures that we interface with, we must enter into their communities, their paradigms and their stories. It is not enough just to have a head knowledge. We need to

experience them and engage them. To do so, we need to grasp the concept of globalization:

Glocalization (or glocalisation) is a portmanteau of globalization and localization. By definition, the term “glocal” refers to the individual, group, division, unit, organization, and community which is willing and is able to “think globally and act locally.” The term has been used to show the human capacity to bridge scales (from local to global) and to help overcome meso-scale, bounded, “little-box” thinking.⁸

In other words, the reality of our lives is that “we”—the culture in which we find ourselves, and “them”—the cultures as they exist for those we come in contact with, are not divisible from each other. To interface, we *must* embrace—who each other is, how we process life, how we experience things, what our stories are and how those stories are determinant for us.

Other people’s stories are as varied as the landscapes and languages of the world; and the storytelling traditions to which they belong tell the different truths of religion and science, of history and the arts. They tell people where they came from, and why they are here; how to live, and sometimes how to die . . . What we share is the practice of believing, which we become adept at very early in our lives’ and it is this practice that generates the power of stories.⁹

The Gospel is the truth that defines and directs our lives as Christians. Yet, the Gospel is story—the Story of God incarnating in our world and our lives and sharing “His” story of redemption and reality with us. We, in turn, as His followers are called to share that Story in the context of the varied stories of “all nations.” Neil Cole describes this process in his book, *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens*:

After [Jesus’] death, burial, resurrection, ascension to heaven, and finally Pentecost, where do people need to go to be in the presence of Almighty God? Wherever His people are, they are in the presence of the Holy God . . . Now the Kingdom of God can enter into every neighborhood and every nation *simultaneously*.¹⁰

It is by engaging the diversity of culture around us with a love that reflects the love that comes from Christ in our hearts that we are enabled to effectively share our Story and stories. It is that love that inspires and compels us to build relationships. But, to build strong and vibrant relationships, there must be the ability to communicate in a manner that is recognized, understood, and accepted by all individuals involved.

Establishing Effective Interface

Embracing diversity through the impetus of Christ's love is a beginning. It is an accepting of the value of another and their cultural experience. But we need to move past acceptance and enter into involvement. The next step that we need to take is to establish an effective means of interface.

My ancestors were from Northern Europe. My wife, Marion's, ancestors were from India. I was raised in the suburban world of Southern California. She was raised in the tropical paradise of Belize and later migrated to America in her childhood. The meeting of our hearts led to interesting intercultural experiences! I was invited to dinner with her family. Her sisters were cordial, her brothers and father were somewhat tolerant. When mealtime came, I was presented with a wonderful feast of Indian-Caribbean cuisine. The food was flavorful—and spicy! I knew that the men in the family figured that this “white boy” couldn't tolerate the heat. But what they didn't know was that I *love* spicy and hot food. Marion's sister asked me if I would like some peppers for my food. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed that her father and brothers had glanced my way. “Aha!” I thought to myself, “Here is my opportunity to impress these guys!”

“Sure! I’d love some jalapeño peppers.” I could handle the heat. Her sister informed me that these were not jalapeños, but rather they were habañero peppers. Jalapeño . . . habañero . . . who cares! Bring them on! I had no idea that habañero peppers are one of the hottest peppers in the world! All eyes were on me as I ate a bite of my food loaded with a huge chunk of habañero. There are no words to describe how hot that bite was! My eyes watered. My nose ran. I started to sweat. I could hardly breathe. But I was determined. When her sister asked me if I was all right, I responded, “Yes! May I have some more of those habañeros?” I ate *more*! It wasn’t until later that my wife’s family informed me that they only eat small cut up pieces of the pepper in food versus big chunks. But my willingness to experience their food and, thus, embrace and interface with their culture won their approval of me.

Gottfried Oosterwal, Professor and Director Emeritus of the Center for Intercultural Relations, Andrews University, provided us with insights into what cross-cultural communication entails:

It is important to stress here that cultural differences are not shaped by biophysical factors such as race or color of the skin, nor are they external and material, such as the way people dress or eat or walk or behave. They are rooted in differences in values, in people’s basic cultural assumptions, in the way they perceive reality, and in their views of what is right or wrong, good or bad, ideal and desirable. These constitute the layers that shape the dynamics of the process of communication between *sender* and *recipient* and, in addition to the layers of age and gender, etc., are responsible for the misunderstandings and distortions and misinterpretations that are characteristics of all cross-cultural communication.¹¹

Recently, I had the good fortune of being a part of an administrative team from my university that went to Gimbie Hospital in Gimbie Town, Ethiopia. We were there for the purpose of strategic planning and international interface. Gimbie Hospital is under the

umbrella of Adventist Health International, an organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The goal was to help the hospital in the efficiency and efficacy of its community outreach and medical practice. It didn't take long for the cross-cultural dynamics to become rapidly evident. You had the Loma Linda Western "let's-hit-the-agenda-and-get-this-thing fixed" mentality (us) mixing with the hospital administrator's British "we-must-be-punctual-and-attend-to-protocol-and-detail" ways that ran full steam into the Ethiopian way. In Ethiopia, the way to do business is based on relationship. You talk, you take your time, and you share stories. When a relationship of trust and camaraderie is developed then business is handled, but at a very different pace from Western ways! The primary focus is always on relationship which trumps outcome. What things are necessary to become competent in cross-cultural interface?

Becoming more culturally competent begins with the ability to describe and analyze one's ethnic identity, and develops into an awareness of how culture influences the attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of self and others. It includes the ability to understand how differences help or hinder social interactions and social relations. Finally, cultural competence requires the skills and metaskills necessary to resolve conflicts, make decisions, and function in novel cultural and interpersonal situations.¹²

Cross-cultural competency requires comprehension, commitment and communication. There needs to be a comprehension and understanding of the cultures, both ours and others. There needs to be a commitment to desire development of relationships and to do what it takes to build those relationships. And, finally, there needs to be effective communication without which the "confusion of Babel" stays in tact. Oosterwal delineates five basic principles of cross-cultural communication and how we can implement them:

1. *Words do not have meaning by themselves; words derive their meaning from people's underlying cultural assumptions, values, and perceptions.* To effectively communicate impels us to take time to build cross-cultural relationships and learn of the life values and cultural ideologies of that culture. It calls for a re-visioning of life together reflected through the other's eyes and experiences.
2. *Consider not only the content of the message, but also its context.* Anthropologists make a helpful distinction between "high-context cultures" and "low-context cultures." We Americans are predominantly a low-context culture. Communication is direct and to the point. We tend to use few words. "Communication in high-context cultures is through an often-artistic flow of words and a lot of "loopings" and "detours." It is through concrete examples, rather than by the use of abstract terms; it is through stories and parables."
3. *Every culture has its own mode of communication.* We need to be aware of what context the people of the culture we are trying to communicate with are in—high context or low. And, most importantly, we are not to impose our own culturally defined mode of communication as being superior. Communication requires connection and connection requires respect and reciprocation.
4. *Always keep in mind the true purpose of communication.* Our purpose as the Kingdom community of Christ is to establish relationships, bring about reconciliation and create a bond and a body of Christ.
5. *There is no communication without identification.* "What that means, in practice, is that in order for a message—or *the message*—to be clearly understood and accepted, the sender must identify with the recipients, become one with them in the setting of their particular culture, empathize with them, declare himself or herself in solidarity with them."¹³

In *Embracing Diversity: How to Understand and Reach People of All Cultures*,

Leslie Pollard presents a juxtaposition of the concepts of ethnocentrism and

ethnorelativism.¹⁴ The following diagram represents the broad strokes of the comparison:

Table 4.1. Comparison of ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism

| Ethnocentrism | Ethnorelativism |
|--|---|
| Assumes superiority of a group, clan, tribe, or race | Assumes equality of all groups as one among many |
| Is maintained by resentment of differences | Is informed and maintained by tolerance, openness, and dialogue |
| Defines itself by clan competition with others | Defines itself by its ability to level the cultural playing field and promote belonging |
| Attempts to validate itself by selective comparisons | Attempts to educate groups away from narcissism |
| Results in the divinization of the group | Results in a moral humanism that promotes harmony between people |

Ethnorelativism, though an admirable ideal and a target we long to reach, proves unattainable. “Ethnorelativism, while appealing, falters because humans, as Scripture asserts, are powerless to fully extricate themselves from the hold of their own self-service. This is why repeated efforts at peacemaking between peoples are at best fragile and frequently broken.”¹⁵ To reach the goal of developing cross-cultural connections, building relationships and forming a community that reflects Christ’s Kingdom of heaven we need something more.

As we discovered earlier, Jesus’ vision for His Kingdom is reflected in the following passage from John:

Just as you [Father] sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world. And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth. I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. (John 17:18-21)

To achieve this God-centric oneness will take more than ethnorelativistic ideals have to offer. It will take a Spirit-empowered Christocentric life:

- Assumes fallen-ness of my group, clan, tribe, race
- Is maintained by a magnetic attraction to the Christ of the Gospels
- Defines itself by cooperation with Christ
- Celebrates self-expenditure on behalf of others
- Results in a radically new way of viewing and serving others.¹⁶

Darrell L. Guder calls a Christocentric group such as this “the community of communities.” In reference to John 17:18-21, he makes the following observations:

[This passage] teaches us that the missional connectedness of the church is not merely a matter of institutional unity, and even less of efficiency, stewardship, good public relations, or effective growth strategies. The oneness spoken of here is a matter of obedience to the Lord of the church, obedience that centers on his mission, “so that the world may know that you have sent me.” The basic missional task of connecting structures, then, is to witness to the one gospel that relates all Christians to one another under their one Lord and sends the church into the world, “to the ends of the earth.”¹⁷

In my office on the credenza behind my desk, I keep a toy that has taught me what Jesus is talking about in John 17:18-20. My son and I found the toy in a museum gift shop. It is a plastic frame approximately one foot square by two inches wide. The middle of the frame holds a perforated sheet of plastic with holes spaced every one-eighth of an inch. Protruding through the holes are little green plastic rods the width of a pencil lead and two inches long. They slide freely back and forth through the perforated sheet but don’t slide out due to each end having a knob on it. The purpose of the toy is that, when you place an object such as a hand or your face against the rods from the back, they are projected in three dimensions in the front. In other words, you see a face made out of little green rods that reflect the real one behind the toy.

Christ desires that we become like this toy to the world around us. What He wants portrayed through us is His likeness, His love, His desire for others. He wants to live in

and through us! When we become like this toy we enable cross-cultural communication to reach its apex purpose—to incarnate Christ to the world. Pollard writes,

In the end, though, God chose the way of *identification*: He became as one of us: poor with the poor, an Asian with the Asians. He took upon Himself our existence, our culture. The Incarnation is the basis of all effective cross-cultural communication: becoming one with the people, taking on their cultural ways for the express purpose of establishing a new relationship with God, a new fellowship, a new communion. This is the purpose of all cross-cultural communication.¹⁸

For the followers of Jesus there is a deeper meaning to “cross-cultural. That deeper meaning is that all of our cross-cultural interaction is transformed into a new cultural oneness and inclusiveness through the cross of Christ. That is what seems to be missing in Christianity today. At its beginnings, Christianity crossed over all barriers and boundaries of nationality, race and culture and formed a universal body. That’s why all the powers that were sought to stamp them out. Christianity seems to be the opposite today, exclusive and separate. Author, futurist and educator, Leonard Sweet sums it up this way:

I take that word “cross-cultural” literally. In fact, I use that word “cross-cultural” where others use the word “counter-cultural,” a word which I NEVER use since it is so anti-incarnational. We aren’t to “counter” other cultures. That’s so not what the incarnation is about. We are in the business of “crossing” every culture—of the laying down and lifting up of the “cross” in every culture—hence “cross-cultural.” Notice the symbol of the cross is a uniting of opposites . . . the vertical ONE and the horizontal MANY.¹⁹

As Christians, we are to incarnate Christ to the cultures around us. To do so, we must become truly *cross-cultural* and *Cross-cultural*. And, in so doing, we discover means of effective communication and dialogue, develop connections and relationships,

and form communities that reflect Christ's desire of diversity and inclusivity. We will become one.

Notes

¹ Peter S. Adler, *Beyond Cultural Identity: Reflections on Multiculturalism*, ed. Milton J. Bennett, Basic Concepts of Intercultural Communication (Boston, MA: Intercultural, 1998), 226.

² Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations* (London: Continuum International, 2002), vii.

³ Dictionary.com, s.v. "covenant," <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/covenant> (November 21, 2007).

⁴ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "rainbow," <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9062494> (November 5, 2007).

⁵ Jesus' inclusiveness is evidenced throughout the Gospel narratives by His involvement of diverse nationalities (ie. Samaritans, Romans, etc.), all socio-economic levels (ie. from beggars to religio-political leaders to the wealthy) and both genders (ie. interactions with women and their inclusion in His following) in the establishment of His Kingdom.

⁶ Bob Roberts, *Glocalization: How Followers of Jesus Engage the New Flat World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 25.

⁷ Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007), x.

⁸ *Wikipedia*, "Glocalisation," Wikipedia, <http://www.reference.com/browse/wiki/Glocalisation> (accessed: December 03, 2007).

⁹ J. Edward Chamberlin, *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?* (Toronto, Canada: Vintage Canada, 2003), 1-2.

¹⁰ Neil Cole, *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 44.

¹¹ Leslie N. Pollard, *Embracing Diversity: How to Understand and Reach People of All Cultures* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 22.

¹² Robert J. Priest and Alvaro L. Nieves, *This Side of Heaven: Race, Ethnicity, and Christian Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 90.

¹³ Pollard, *Embracing Diversity*, 24-30.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

¹⁷ Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church to North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 250.

¹⁸ Pollard, *Embracing Diversity*, 31.

¹⁹ Leonard Sweet, chat room discussion with George Fox University doctoral cohort, December 4, 2007.

CHAPTER 5

INTERPLACE AND THE CIRCLE OF BELONGING

After years of functioning as a pastor of churches, I found myself ministering in the role of a campus chaplain. This meant that I would experience what every churchgoer faces—the daunting task of finding a “church home.” My wife and I were looking for a place to experience stimulating corporate worship, to be able to serve and be involved in ministries, and to be spiritually nurtured ourselves. One day, after multiple church-searching experiences and an undeterminable number of programs and services, I found myself still feeling empty. What was the problem? I heard great sermons. I was moved and filled by meaningful worship. The core issue: I felt no community connection. Though my family and I would attend and attempt to be involved week after week, there was no communal reciprocation past conventional pleasantries and surface conversations. Even if we made the first move and invited someone over to our home, it seemed that the relational/communal ball never got rolling.

Recently while enjoying a family day outing to a local beach city, we were shopping in a souvenir store. My wife and children were immersed in the business of searching for “trophy” items to purchase. I, being the non-shopper that I am, contented myself with strolling through the seemingly endless shelves of items. During my wanderings, a specific item grabbed my attention. There, on one of the lower shelves, was a collection of special candleholders that my wife and I had been looking for ever since we saw and

admired one at a family member's house. There was nothing unique about the material it was made of. It consisted of simple terra cotta. What made it so special was what it was formed into. It was a candle holder, but not your everyday run-of-the-mill one. In the middle was a spot to place a candle. Surrounding the candle was a circle of little human figures facing inward towards the candle. They were linked together arm-in-arm. The sign above the candleholders read, "Circle of Friends."

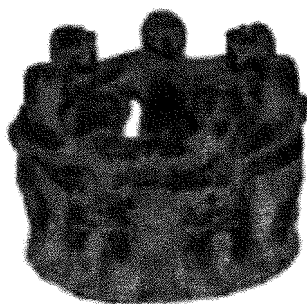


Figure 5.1. Circle of friends candle holder

Standing in that little shop staring at the clay figures, the notion hit me with full force: Without a vital and vibrant community of relationally involved individuals focused on Jesus, Christ's dream for His kingdom cannot become a reality. Propositional profundity is not the determining factor. Without that community being formed around, and centered by, the incarnation of the *Imago Dei*¹ in their midst, it is not a community of followers of Jesus. Henri Nouwen paints the following portrait of the heart condition of the society we live in:

Beneath all the great accomplishments of our time, there is a deep current of despair. While efficiency and control are the great aspirations of our society, the loneliness, isolation, lack of friendship and intimacy, broken relationships,

boredom, feelings of emptiness and depression, and a deep sense of uselessness fill the hearts of millions of people in our success-oriented world.²

If, in the mind of Christ, the development of community is so central and crucial in order to establish the *Missio Dei*,³ then that understanding calls several questions to mind: How is Christ incarnated into a community? What are the dynamics that develop such a community? How is the community sustained? Our goal is to find answers to those questions and others that might turn up in the hope of determining a road map to birthing a Christ-dreamed "Circle of Friends" community within the context of the emerging culture.

Lighting the Candle: Incarnating Community

Is it correct to state that the creation of community is crucial to the heart of God and, subsequently, that Christ incarnates Himself in the midst of such a community?⁴ Even before the creation of humanity, the book of Genesis reveals that God had a specific vision of community in mind for us:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, to be like ourselves" . . . So God created man in his own image; God patterned them after himself; male and female he created them . . . And the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a companion who will help him." (Gen. 1:26-27, 2:18)

In these passages, we get a glimpse of the Trinity as a community of love. Stanley Grenz describes this community in his book, *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living*:

Active, self-giving love builds the unity within the one God. The unity of God is nothing less than each of the Trinitarian persons giving himself to the others. This unity is the dedication of each to the others. Through all eternity the Father loves the Son, and the Son reciprocates that love. This love is the Holy Spirit, who is

the Spirit of the relationship of the Father and the Son. Through all eternity, therefore, God is the social Trinity, the community of love.⁵

The desire of God to have humanity reflect the intimate interconnectedness of the triune community is continued by Jesus' own words quoted by John in his writings:

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples . . . All those who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come to them, and live with them. (John 13:34-35; 14:23)

John further carries on this same train of thought by stating:

All who proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God. We know how much God loves us, and we put our trust in him. God is love, and all who live in love live in God and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. . . because we are like Christ here in this world. (1 John 4:15-17)

These scriptural passages clearly delineate the desire of the Father to incarnate Christ in community. The startling thought is revealed that Jesus fully intends that He will be incarnated to the world through *us* in the context of community! Grenz underscores this thought:

Because God is a plurality-in-unity, the ideal for humankind does not focus on solitary persons, but on persons-in-community. God intends that we reflect the divine nature in our lives. This is only possible as we move out of our isolation and into godly relationships with others. Consequently, true Christian living is life-in-relationship or life-in-community.⁶

The apostle Paul fleshes out these concepts of intimacy of interrelationship and incarnation in his illustration of Christ's body and our work of reconciliation: "The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up only one body. So it is with the body of Christ . . . we have all been baptized into Christ's body by one Spirit, and we

have all received the same Spirit . . . Now all of you together are Christ's body, and each one of you is a separate and necessary part of it" (1 Cor. 12:12-13, 7). Paul is stressing the point that, though we are each unique individuals, we cannot function in the capacity that God created us to have until our individuality is connected corporately in the body-community of Christ. We are a system that brings to life the core of Christ's kingdom—love! And love finds its fulfillment and realization in relationship. Paul writes,

This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" (2 Cor. 5:17-20)

The concept of reconciliation brings to mind the reestablishment of relationships that have somehow become disconnected and distanced. Through the impacting interconnectedness of a Christ-community, Jesus wants to continue the work of reconciliation that God launched through His Incarnation. A reconciling community inherently needs to be relational. To be relational, the community needs to be knowledgeable and interactive with the culture and society around it. Not as an observer, but, rather as a participant. Not only objectively, but subjectively as well. Brenda Salter McNeil drives home this point in her book, *A Credible Witness: Reflections on Power, Evangelism and Race*:

We must engage [people] with a spiritual ear for the deeper thirst and understanding of the context of their well. Rather than telling non-Christians what to do or participating in theological, social or political debates, how about offering them something so intriguing that they will want to know more and begin to ask questions? This would require us to know enough of their culture, social

conditions and religious ideas to get beyond some superficial conversations. This insight will enable us not to be distracted but to be knowledgeable about their terrain.”⁷

Evangelism changes from being about the business of increasing membership that is housed in ever-expanding physical plants to a community of believers expanding their interaction with the society around them in increasingly intertwined relationships based on care, concern and love. It is a community in which love compels to action. N.T.

Wright writes,

When the church is seen to move straight from worship of God to affecting much-needed change in the world; when it becomes clear that the people who feast at Jesus’ table are the ones at the forefront of work to eliminate hunger and famine; when people realize that those who pray for the Spirit to work in and through them are the people who seem to have extra resources of love and patience in caring for those whose lives are damaged, bruised, and shamed—then it is natural for people to recognize that something is going on that they want to be a part of.⁸

Christ is the “candle” that forms the nucleus of His community. The “fire” that ignites it is the Holy Spirit that unleashes the power of love that warms and attracts people to it.

But what forms the “Circle of Friends”? What are the dynamics that develop such a community?

Forming the Circle: Developing Community

For years, the outreach of Church was to provide platforms and programs that would entice the “world” to come so that the “Truth” could be presented to them in a propositional format. The plan was that, once they heard what the Bible had to say, they would be convicted and convinced and want to join. And for years, that strategy worked. But, in my opinion, it worked because of some underlying factors. First of all, as was

mentioned before, many people were either Christian or had been Christian or were nominal Christians or, at least, knew some of what the basics of Christianity were. So, they just had to be convinced to adopt the life. Secondly, community wasn't as much of a concern because, in those times, community was more inherent. People lived in the same neighborhoods for decades if not all of their lives. They tended to stay in one career in one location until retirement. Both the extended family and the nuclear family were intact and strong. Thus, the acceptance of propositional truth was all that was needed along with lifestyle change and the addition of a Church community to worship with and learn from. How different is the culture we live in now!

Families are fragmented and reconfigured. People live in seemingly constant transition from one locality to another, from one job to another, even from one career to another. Knowledge is overwhelmingly everywhere and easily at our fingertips, but community is rare and elusive. People long to be needed. People crave friendship and love. People want to be valued. People desperately want to be a part of a community. People long for authenticity that is lived out in the daily lives of individuals. What people need is to see and experience God's heart of love lived out through the love and lives of those who claim to follow Jesus. Author and emerging evangelist, Jim Henderson, echoes these thoughts:

If being Christians meant we were the most *real* people on earth rather than the most religious, evangelism as a program would disappear forever. Why? Simply because the people Jesus misses most would be exposed to his message through the very natural means of friendship, kindness, concern, and listening ears. This kind of reality would surprise and mystify them instead of confusing them. Perhaps then the missing would seek *the found* to find out more about what motivates the caring nature of those who live authentic lives.⁹

The formation of such a community finds its authorship and impetus in the heart of God.

Author Stan Grenz pursues this concept further:

According to the Bible, God's ultimate desire is to create from all nations a reconciled people living within a renewed creation and enjoying the presence of the Triune God. This biblical vision of "community" is the goal of history . . . we know that we have encountered God in that we have been brought to share in community, that is, as we enjoy fellowship with God and participate in the people of faith . . . The participation in community with God, each other, and creation offers a final answer not only to the question about the possibility of knowing God but also the question of God's existence.¹⁰

When we, as followers of Jesus, learn of His love and live in and live out His love in our lives and relationships, we become "gateways"¹¹ of that love to the people around us who don't know it or have never experienced it.

When we have understood and experienced the love of God as revealed in the Gospel, our hearts are transformed into the heart of Jesus. Our relationships reflect the love, forgiveness, acceptance and authenticity of the relationship that Christ has with us. When we embrace these truths we reach out and embrace each other as Jesus embraces us. We form a "circle of friendship." We become a community with Christ as the nucleus. Jesus makes this astounding promise, "For where two or three gather together because they are mine, I am there among them" (Matt. 18:20). When we embrace these truths and each other, we are ready to embrace others outside of the circle.

The development of community entails two essential ingredients: trust and acceptance. Trust is the initial ingredient that enables all else. To establish the trust of others in us we must be willing to be transparent and vulnerable. "Trust is the ability to risk oneself, and there is no trust-building without risk . . . God's mandate is clear: life

comes through relationship to self, to others, and to God. These relationships only mature in the crucible of trust.”¹²

In the book *Building Community*, the authors provide a list of essential elements in building trust:¹³

- Willingness to progressively disclose oneself to the members of the community
- Willingness to receive the disclosure of others in confidentiality
- Consistent behavior with others
- Following through on commitments
- Affirmation and acceptance of others
- Avoiding judgment of others
- Being trustworthy and honest
- Focus on areas that members share in common
- Scrupulously avoid stereotypes.

When the incarnated community is living in a way that builds bridges of trust and provides a climate where individuals can grow in self-confidence and a willingness to be transparent and risk vulnerability, then Christ’s “dwelling in the midst of them” becomes readily discernable. Mutual trust must be evident in order for people to build relationships. Mutual trust grows with self-disclosure, but self-disclosure will never happen unless individuals experience the second essential for community: acceptance.

If there is a discernible sense of acceptance, more will be shared and trust will develop. The relationship continues to grow as both persons continue to trust and be self-disclosing . . . Trust demands the presence of a number of qualities, especially openness, sharing and acceptance. Openness is a quality of being candid, combined with a confidence in the goodness of the other. Sharing is the willingness to be vulnerable by committing thoughts, ideas and feelings into words. Acceptance is the quality of receiving the openness and sharing of the other . . . [it] is communicating to members an appreciation of who and what they are.¹⁴

Too often, what we experience in life is juxtaposed to openness, sharing and acceptance. Those are alien elements in society as it is played out in the media, politics and reality of our daily existence. When those qualities exist within the community of Jesus followers, it gives evidence to a love that is greater than human.

The difference between community and a group of friends is that in a community we verbalize our mutual belonging and bonding. We announce the goals and the spirit that unites us. We recognize also that this bonding comes from God; it is a gift from God. It is he who has chosen us and called us together in a covenant of love and mutual caring.¹⁵

The walls of our own creation are what block us from experiencing community. These walls that we think are blocking others out turn out to be walls of isolation that keep us individually trapped inside them. God is about breaking down the walls. "There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. For you are all Christians—you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Vanier captures the essence of acceptance in the following quote:

Communities are truly communities when they are open to others, when they remain vulnerable and humble; when the members are growing in love, in compassion and in humility. Communities cease to be such when members close in upon themselves with the certitude that they alone have wisdom and truth and expect everyone to be like them and learn from them. The fundamental attitudes of true community, where there is true belonging, are openness, welcome, and listening to God, to the universe, to each other and to other communities. . . . Sects put up walls and barriers out of fear, out of a need to prove themselves and to create a false security. Community is the breaking down of barriers to welcome difference.¹⁶

Experiencing true love, acceptance, forgiveness and trustworthiness through God's love relationship with us enables us to take the risk of breaking down the walls and

opening up our circle of relationships to include those outside the community of Christ.

The circle is broadened and a new community is formed.

Holding the Circle Together: Sustaining Community

In life, birth is not the culmination, but just the beginning. The same holds true for a community. The formation is the inauguration. Once formed, how is a community sustained? It remains vibrant and alive through wholeness of relationships, forgiveness and loving service. Jesus stated that the foundational principle of the Bible and, for that matter His Kingdom-community, is based on relationships of love:

Jesus replied, "You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself. The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments." (Matt. 22:37-40)

Community is sustained through loving relationships between God and us and those around us. The love relationship between God and us, individually, form the boundaries, context and means by which we can live out relationships of love with others. "The church is more than a loosely related group of people. We share a fundamental vertical commitment—loyalty to Christ—which shapes our very lives. But our common allegiance to Jesus, in turn, forms a bond between us that is greater than all other human bonds."¹⁷

God's unconditional, unfailing love for us heals us, fills us and transforms us. It teaches us how to love each other. The vertical love dimension recreates our horizontal relationships.

This felt bond adds a horizontal commitment to the vertical. Our common allegiance to Jesus draws us together. Because of our loyalty to him, we are committed to each other. We desire to “walk” together as one discipleship band, to be a people in relationship with one another. We who name Jesus as Lord, therefore, become one body—a fellowshiping people, a community . . . God’s purpose is the salvation of individuals. But God saves us *together*, not in isolation. And he saves us *for* community, not *out of* it.¹⁸

It is in the context of our healed and restored vertical relationship with God that our broken horizontal relationships with those around us can be brought into wholeness. “When we realize how much God has forgiven us, we can be more forgiving of others. The cost of that forgiveness has already been paid in the love of Christ on the cross.”¹⁹

The suture that binds the brokenness of our relationships is forgiveness. Love is the power that breaks down the walls that separate us. Love is the initiator that redirects us towards each other. But forgiveness is the impetus for reconciliation. Without forgiveness there is no possibility that relationships can be restored. Forgiveness is the bridge that spans the chasms that separate us.

Community is the place of forgiveness . . . If we come into community without knowing that the reason we come is to learn to forgive and be forgiven seven times seventy-seven times, we will soon be disappointed . . . To forgive is also to understand the cry behind the behavior . . . To forgive is also to look into oneself and to see where one should . . . also ask for forgiveness and make amends. To forgive is to recognize once again . . . the covenant which binds us together with those we do not get along with well . . . It is to give them space in our hearts.²⁰

When we forgive people, we clean out the grudges and negative baggage that have accumulated and we are able to give them “space in our hearts” to be loved. We give them garden space in fertile soil in which relationships can grow and thrive. To reap a bountiful harvest takes loving service. Jesus defined loving service in the context of

leadership in His Kingdom-community when He addressed the disciples and their power squabbles:

But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Matt. 20:26-28)

In this context, love—for God and for others—constrains our actions and is the “master” that dictates all of our dealings. Our loving care for each other in the context of community is its sustaining lifeblood.

We are to be a community bound together by the love present among us through the power of God’s Spirit. This divine love is exemplified by humble service to each other and to the world. Indeed, as we exist in love, we are the image of God—that is, we reflect what God is like. Thereby, we bring glory to him, for we exemplify the love that lays at the heart of the dynamic of the Triune God, which Christ himself has revealed to us.²¹

Finding InterPlace and the Circle of Belonging

There is a haunting scene in the Disney animated film entitled, *Dumbo*. The movie tracks the chain of events that transpire in the little elephant, Dumbo’s life. Much to the chagrin and embarrassment of the circus elephant community, he is born with extremely oversized ears. Dumbo experiences increasing ostracism until, finally, after his mother’s incarceration, the other elephants take action. When little Dumbo enters the circus wagon, all the elephants form a circle, heads inward and rumps out, close ranks and effectively block Dumbo from inclusion. He is thus banned from elephant society.

In that scene is reflected the feelings and condition of many in the emerging culture. They feel excluded. They feel isolated. They feel lonely. The questions of their

hearts are: “Who am I? Where do I belong? Where will I find real authentic love?” Just like little Dumbo, they want to know that they are accepted, valued and loved. They live in a world filled with exclusive “elephant communities.” The God that formed us feels their pain and did something about it. He created the “circle of belonging.”

Nature provides us with another example of circling behavior in the animal world. Yet this example is the antithesis of the circle of elephants in Dumbo’s world. It is the circle of inclusivity exhibited by musk oxen.



Figure 5.2. Musk oxen

Musk oxen form a defensive formation when threatened (figure 5.2). They will first run to a higher location, then turn and stand shoulder-to-shoulder in a circle. With their heads lowered, they form an impenetrable wall. The young, aged and ill are protected in the center of the circle. No predator, even a polar bear, can breach the circle. As followers of Jesus, we are called to form just such a circle of belonging.

The early Celtic Christian community created a unique representation of the cross of Christ (figure 5.3).

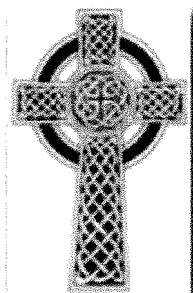


Figure 5.3. Celtic cross

Within its symbolism, we discover how to create the Kingdom-community that Jesus dreams of. The vertical of the cross represents the love and community we experience with the Triune God. The horizontal of the cross represents the love relationships we have with others. However, unless *both* the horizontal and vertical converge in our lives, we are left with only relational abortions. “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is a liar; for if we don’t love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we have not seen? And God himself has commanded that we must love not only him but our Christian brothers and sisters, too” (1 John 4:21-22).

To birth Christian community, the vertical and horizontal must converge. This convergence creates the circle. This is what the Celtic Christians called the “sacred space” and designated their community:

This Christian community was sacred ground. It carried with it all the circular elements of Celtic spirituality but most importantly the early Celtic Christian communities were thin spots, in the circle the sacred world and the material world were one. The kingdom of God, or the fulfillment of God, was present in community; in fact, God was present in their midst . . . They believed the sacred and the secular were not separate on earth and that in their community heaven joined to earth. This was especially true in the case of the sacred circle. They believed that by drawing a circle, imagining a circle, or building a circle they could make sacred space.²²

This “circle of belonging” is a place of love and forgiveness, acceptance and involvement. It is a place where the Gospel becomes reality. And, just like the interweave motif on the Celtic cross, it is an “inter-place.”

InterPlace is formed where the “vertical” beam of the cross intersects the “horizontal” beam. InterPlace can only come into being when our vertical love relationship with God is living and vibrant and growing within the boundaries of His Word. The mistaken notion of many postmoderns is that propositional truth is outmoded at best and destructive at worst. Yet this sole focus on things relational and experiential isn’t sufficient to fulfill the *Missio Dei*.

Working as I do in an allied health sciences environment I am confronted with the effects of cancer on patients’ bodies. Briefly described, cancer is the uncontrolled growth of cells that destroys the healthy tissue around it. Growth, which is normally a good and desirable thing, in this case is destructive to the body because it is uncontrolled.

It is the same thing in the relational realm. Relationships that don’t have healthy boundaries cause pain, confusion and ultimately fall apart leaving a path of devastation behind them. It stands to reason that God, who created a universe based on love, would best know the healthy boundaries to set for the growth of healthy relationships. That’s what His Word is all about. In it exists the delineation of those boundaries and guidelines. But, just like reading and memorizing a gardening book will never produce a garden without planting one, so too memorizing propositional truths without living them never produces the living community of Christ.

InterPlace can only come into being when our horizontal love relationships with others are living and vibrant and growing within the boundaries of His Word. InterPlace is an emotional, mental, spiritual and physical place of community. Within InterPlace, the Circle of Belonging is manifested. It is a place where every individual's life and experience is interwoven with each other. It is a place of warmth and acceptance. It is a place of authenticity about our lives and struggles. It is a place where we live deeply with each other. No one walks the journey alone. The community is birthed and thrives. And the heart of Jesus beats in its center!

Notes

¹ Counter Balance, "*Imago Dei*," Counter Balance, <http://www.counterbalance.net/theogloss/imago-body.html> (April 18, 2008). *Imago Dei*: The term *imago Dei* refers most fundamentally to two things: first, God's own self-actualization through humankind; and second, God's care for humankind. To say that humans are made in the image of God is to recognize the special qualities of human nature which allow God to be made manifest in humans. In other words, for humans to have the conscious recognition of their being in the image of God means that they are the creatures through whom God's plans and purposes can be made known and actualized; humans, in this way, can be seen as co-creators with God. The moral implications of the doctrine of *Imago Dei* are apparent in the fact that if humans are to love God, then humans must love other humans, as each is an expression of God. The human's likeness to God can also be understood by contrasting it with that which does not image God, i.e., beings who, as far as we know, are without self-consciousness and the capacity for spiritual/ moral reflection and growth. Humans differ from all other creatures because of their rational structure—their capacity for deliberation and free decision-making. This freedom gives the human a centeredness and completeness which allows the possibility for self-actualization and participation in a sacred reality.

² Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 20-21.

³ For a workable understanding of *Missio Dei* I cite the following quote: "Our mission has not life of its own: only in the hands of the sending God can it truly be called mission. Not least since the missionary initiative comes from God alone . . . Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission. There is church because there is mission, not vice versa. To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love." David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 389–390.

⁴ The following scriptural excursion is, by no means, meant to be exhaustive. Rather it is meant to be representative of the tenor of the whole.

⁵ Stanley J. Grenz, *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 47.

⁶ Ibid., 51.

⁷ Brenda Salter McNeil, *A Credible Witness: Reflections on Power, Evangelism, and Race* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 94. In referencing the concept of a well, McNeil is using the story of Jesus and His interaction with the Samaritan women at Jacob's Well as the framework for the development of her processes and discussions in regards to racial and cultural reconciliation by the Christian community implementing Christ's methodologies. The well is a metaphor for their life circumstances and environment.

⁸ N.T. Wright, "Heaven Is Not Our Home," *Christianity Today*, April 2008, 36-39.

⁹ Jim Henderson, *Evangelism without Additives: What If Sharing Your Faith Meant Just Being Yourself?* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2007), 45.

¹⁰ Grenz, *Created for Community*, 38.

¹¹ "The mystery of ministry is that we have been chosen to make our own limited and very conditional love the gateway for the unlimited and unconditional love of God." Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 62.

¹² Hammett Loughlan, Rosine Sofield, and Carroll Juliano, *Building Community* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria, 1998), 52.

¹³ Ibid., 53. This list is included to provide a brief insight of elements needed in community formation and is not meant to be all-inclusive or exhaustive.

¹⁴ Ibid., 54-56.

¹⁵ Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1989), 18.

¹⁶ Ibid., 19-20.

¹⁷ Grenz, *Created for Community*, 213.

¹⁸ Ibid., 214.

¹⁹ Loughlan, Sofield, and Juliano, *Building Community*, 97.

²⁰ Grenz, *Created for Community*, 37-38.

²¹ Ibid., 218.

²² Jerry C. Doherty, *A Celtic Model of Ministry: The Reawakening of Community Spirituality* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003), 45.

CHAPTER 6

LIVING THE CIRCLE OF BELONGING

The following story was reported by CNN on November 14, 2008:¹

A British couple who married in a lavish Second Life wedding ceremony are to divorce after one of them had an alleged "affair" in the online world. Amy Taylor, 28, said she had caught husband David Pollard, 40, having sex with an animated woman. The couple, who met in an Internet chatroom in 2003, are now separated. "I went mad—I was so hurt. I just couldn't believe what he'd done," Taylor told the Western Morning News. "It may have started online, but it existed entirely in the real world and it hurts just as much now it is over."

Second Life allows users to create alter egos known as "avatars" and interact with other players, forming relationships, holding down jobs and trading products and services for a virtual currency convertible into real life dollars. Taylor said she had caught Pollard's avatar having sex with a virtual prostitute: "I looked at the computer screen and could see his character having sex with a female character. It's cheating as far as I'm concerned."

The couple's real-life wedding in 2005 was eclipsed by a fairy tale ceremony held within Second Life. But Taylor told the Western Morning News she had subsequently hired an online private detective to track his activities: "He never did anything in real life, but I had my suspicions about what he was doing in Second Life." Pollard admitted having an online relationship with a "girl in America" but denied wrongdoing. "We weren't even having cyber sex or anything like that, we were just chatting and hanging out together," he told the Western Morning News.

We live in a time and culture in which we have to contend with two "worlds"—the real world and the virtual world. Since the birth of humanity, the real world is the one that we have interacted with and existed in. Its dimensions are discerned by our senses—what we can see, hear, feel and experience. More and more, that world is colliding with the virtual world. A virtual world, or reality, is defined as "A . . . simulation of a real or

imaginary system that enables a user to perform operations on the simulated system and shows the effects in real time.”ⁱⁱⁱ With the collision of these worlds comes confusion as to what does an authentic relationship consist of. Did the relationship that Doug had in cyberspace constitute reality? My answer would be an emphatic “NO!” Did his virtual interactions have consequences with his reality relationship with Amy? Absolutely!

Real relationships exist between living, breathing beings, not between animate and inanimate. Virtual relationships are not ultimately fulfilling to real individuals in all the dynamics and dimensions of real relationships. Virtual relationships are based on fantasy—a bending of reality to our wishes and/or interpretations. Real relationships involve real interactions with real individuals. We long to belong to others and live in real flesh and blood communities. Author Joseph R. Meyers echoes these sentiments,

Looking for someone? We all are. But who? We don’t want to be alone. But when it comes to belonging, we’re confused. And our culture is confused. We are together, all alone. If there is one conversation with which the emerging church must wrestle in new ways, it is the question, “Who is my neighbor?” Who belongs? For whom am I responsible? And who is responsible to me? How can we help people develop a healthy experience of belonging and community in their lives?ⁱⁱⁱ

God has hardwired us to be relational beings that find our ultimate fulfillment in the context of His Kingdom-Community. The apostle Peter describes this Kingdom-Community by using the metaphor of God’s temple: “Come to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God’s temple . . . And now God is building you, as living stones, into His Spiritual temple. What’s more, you are God’s holy priests, who offer the spiritual sacrifices that please Him because of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:4-5). Peter describes God’s “temple” as a living organism, not in terms of lifeless stone and mortar.

God's temple is made up of individuals united together—cemented together—into a community whose breath of life is breathed by His Spirit. And the creative connective forces of that community reside in the vertical adhesiveness of loving “God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind” in combination with the horizontal stickiness of loving “your neighbor as yourself.” Where the vertical and horizontal intersect is the place we’ve labeled as the InterPlace. Here is the space where Kingdom-Community exists. It is within the guidelines of love laid out by the God of love that this community of love can be birthed.

If we are not connecting people in community—so they know together (“together will all the saints” as Paul says in Ephesians 3:18) and grow together and serve together and suffer together and rejoice and cry and feast and fast and give and live and fall and rise together—then we are spinning our wheels in terms of authentic Christian ministry, whether modern or postmodern or whatever. In modernity we thought “knowing” was something that happened in an individual’s mind; now we begin to see that knowing is a connective experience, not unrelated to loving.^{iv}

Peter describes the “living stones” as being “priests offering spiritual sacrifices.” A priest was an individual who was chosen by God for the special purpose of helping Him in the reconciliation of humanity to God. To minister in a space—the temple--where the human/divine interface could happen. In the “living temple” of community the space where the reconciliation of humanity-to-divinity and humanity-to-humanity can occur is within the Circle of Belonging. It is not a “stone and mortar” place. Rather, it is a holding space that we create for each other. Kevin Kaiser, speaker, author and faculty member of the Spiritual Leadership Institute, gave the following definition of “holding space”:^v

When we hold space for each other, we hold pure possibility. It is a gift of consciousness that recognizes something really beautiful is trying to emerge

through another human being. And like the nature of the expression itself, this emergence sits at a level of truth that does not want to be reduced, or arranged, or understood. When we ask somebody to hold space for us, we are invoking pure possibility through their gift of consciousness. What we feel trying to move through us is not speakable, but has a power we can not turn away from . . . It is this dance with possibility that makes holding space a most precious gift.

What are the elements needed to establish the Circle of Belonging? As we discovered in looking at what it takes to form this space for community, we need the elements of openness, acceptance, inclusiveness and authenticity all motivated by love—the love of Christ both experienced by us and lived out through us. When we possess these elements a natural space is created in our hearts and lives for others because God has created that space for us in His.

When I was a young boy in grade school I was shy. Mentioning that fact stuns people who know me now because I am such a sanguine person. My wife, Marion, claims that nobody is a stranger to me! It's true. I talk to almost anyone anytime anywhere. But that hasn't always been the case. What made that radical transformation in me? It was one simple thought. It happened on the night before I would begin my first day as a freshman in high school. I wanted so badly to be able to fit in and make friends. I hoped and prayed that *someone* would come up and be friendly to me. That was the magical moment when *The Thought* flashed into my mind.

I was always waiting for someone to come up and be friendly to me. What if *everybody* was waiting for the same thing?! If I became *that* friendly person it could open up a world of possible relationships! That's it. That is the simple thought that transformed me. It is the simple thought that can transform you and your relationships, too. It is the

underlying principle that creates holding space in the Circle of Belonging. It is the willingness to be open to relationship and being proactive about making it happen. It is taking the first step of our relationship dance set to the music of Christ's Kingdom-Community of love.

Beyond this there are three essentials that must be present. The first is that the Circle of Belonging is defined by our encounters with God through the Scriptures. That is where we discover how God relates to us. We find His view of us which gives us a healthy and whole self-concept. It is there that we learn healthy descriptions and guidelines for our relationships with others. As we experience God's absolute love and forgiveness, healing and wholeness in our lives we are transformed.

As for me, may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in this world has been crucified, and the world's interest in me has also died. It doesn't matter whether we have been circumcised or not. What counts is whether we have been transformed into a new creation. May God's peace and mercy be upon all who live by this principle; they are the new people of God. (Gal. 6:14-16 NLT)

This act of God's "re-creation" of us establishes the essential elements of openness, acceptance, inclusiveness and authenticity. It enables us to become the "new people of God" and to create a new community based on the Kingdom paradigm of Christ. The second essential for the Circle of Belonging is that God gives us the desire and power to create it because our hearts have been transformed. "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect" (Rom 12:2).

The Circle of Belonging isn't a program that you create in your strategic planning sessions. It is a relational reality created by a transformed heart and life. We want it because we have experienced it in our relationship with God. We desire it because we want to experience it in our relationship with others and that they, in turn, will experience it in the other relationships of their lives. This brings us to the third essential in creating the Circle of Belonging.

Have you ever heard or read something that powerfully impacted your heart or thoughts? Was it something that caused you to take stock of your own life and actions and convinced you that you should implement it—but you never did? Knowing and giving mental assent isn't enough. The Circle of Belonging can only be birthed when we purposefully seek to establish it in the relational arenas of our lives.

The early 1990's had come. I was still in the early years of my ministry. Small groups were all the rage in church growth and development. Books that I read and seminars that I attended assured me that my little church could reach megachurch status, too! All I needed to do was to get everybody involved in small groups. So, armed with my strategic plan of "how-to's," I descended on my ministry team leaders. We crafted our vision. We hammered out our mission statement. We drew up our organizational flow charts. We proclaimed our plans to the church-at-large. And, with much fanfare and gusto, we launched our small groups.

Things went great—for awhile. Then things started to crumble. Some groups went just great! Others, however, did not go so great. Some made it for the covenanted term of meeting together, but never met again! Others split because of bad intergroup dynamics.

Later on we discovered that many of the members just “went along with things” because we, the leadership team, were so excited that they didn’t want to let us down. Truth be told, many people didn’t even join a small group because “It wasn’t their thing.”

What went wrong? Bad planning? Wrong mission statement? Was the small group concept a bust? No. Our problem was that we didn’t understand what community was really all about. We didn’t know about the relational spaces of our lives. Jesus did.

The Gospels reveal some interesting things about relational spaces and Jesus’ interaction with them. First of all, there was the crowd that always seemed to follow Jesus wherever He went. The depth of their interaction with Him didn’t go much further than just being around to experience His latest teaching or healing or observe the conflicts with the religious rulers. Yet, Jesus embraced them in the space that they were at and always invited them to go deeper.

The next space is represented by the seventy disciples. They experienced all that the crowd did, but they had a closer relationship to the Master and more community and purpose among themselves. Then there was the space occupied by the twelve disciples. They were called by Christ. They followed Him, ate with Him and they experienced deeper teaching and connection with Him than the seventy.

But yet an even deeper relational space is represented by the three—Peter, James and John. On several occasions, they were singled out by Jesus and shared a more intimate experience with Christ than the others. What can we discover from this? To begin with, we can decipher that each of our lives have multiple relational spaces. Morgen Jahnke, in his article entitled, “Proxemics: The Study of Personal Space”^{vi} refers

to four spaces of human interaction discovered by the research of Edward T. Hall in the 1960s:

In 1966 anthropologist Edward T. Hall coined the term proxemics to describe the study of how people perceive the proximity of other . . . Based on these insights . . . Edward Hall developed the idea of a set of expanding circles, called reaction bubbles, that described how humans manage the space around them. The innermost circle he identified as Intimate space, reserved for those we are closest to, and usually measuring 6 to 18 inches in radius. The next level up he dubbed Personal space, the distance we are comfortable maintaining with close friends, about 1.5 to 4 feet. He used the term Social space to indicate our preferred proximity to acquaintances, about 5–12 feet, and Public space for the distance we need for public speaking, 12–25 feet or more.

Author Joseph R. Meyers, in his book *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups*, translates Hall's spaces and applies them to developing community. He states, "I have discovered that Hall's spaces are helpful categories not only for culture and communication, but also as they relate to community—our sense of belonging. We experience belonging in the same four spaces Hall describes: public, social, personal, and intimate."^{vi} Public space relates to the crowd or multitude that followed Jesus. They felt a sense of belonging in the larger corporate sense.

I love football. In fact, I am a devoted San Francisco '49 ers fan. (Yes, I know. We've had some lean years, but we'll come back!) I have a team tee shirt, cap and jacket. I feel a part of the whole network of fans. I'll watch a game in which I'll share cheers and jeers at the action on the field. I might even share my insights and reactions to the plays and players with my fellow fan next to me, but nothing of depth in regards to myself. I belong in the public space of my life—and I still experience community. Myers says, "True community can be experienced in public space. Public space is not mere

togetherness; it is connectedness. It is *family*. An essential key to developing community is the maturing of our competencies for growing significant, committed public belongings.”^{viii}

How would the concepts of InterPlace and the Circle of Belonging work in my sphere of ministry? Diversity is the best description of the university environment I minister in! How could I build community and bridge the gaps between the modernism of the faculty and the postmodernism of the students. How could I bridge the cultural, racial, ethnic and gender gaps that exist in a student demographic of 80 plus countries coupled with representatives of every socio-economic stratum? Beyond that, how could I provide a way to bring people of other religions into a place where they could experience the incarnation of Christ? What I needed was a “birth canal” through which this diversity of demographics could be birthed into the community of Christ.

Working in collaboration between the campus chaplains and student leaders, we conceived the idea of a worship experience called BOND. It would be a public space encounter that would develop the concepts of InterPlace and the Circle of Belonging in an atmosphere of worship, learning, and experiential events. We wanted those in attendance to taste, see, smell, hear and feel what another’s culture, life and beliefs are all about. BOND would have a large community component to it in that the music, worship and teaching will represent the variety and flavors of the diverse populace involved. We would start with a mini-concert featuring different cultural music components. This would be followed by a small community component incarnated in a more intimate group interaction. Round tables were arranged with a seating of eight chairs each. Each table

had a facilitator that represented a different culture whose job was to help keep conversation focused and flowing.

The small group would share their personal stories, eat a sample of indigenous foods of the host culture, and learn of the common dreams, dreads, and life moments that all of us share no matter who or what we are and where we come from. Afterwards, everyone would join together again in a worship experience of praise singing reflecting cultural diversity and a speaker sharing on an aspect of the InterPlace and Circle of Belonging concept.^{ix} The evening concluded with everyone mixing and eating from an international buffet.

Our dream was to get a hundred people to attend. Personally, I thought we'd be doing well if got thirty or forty. Wrong! Over three hundred people showed up representing the cultural spectrum of the rainbow! Did the concepts work? Every group participated in the songs, whether they were of their culture or not. At the end of the InterPlace small group interaction, we had to go around to each table and "encourage" them to end and go to the main service.

During the buffet at the end, many people went back to eat with the individuals they had interacted with during InterPlace to continue their conversations. The key to BOND's success wasn't due to programming genius. It clicked because an environment was created that fostered connection and community.

The next level of relational space is our social space. This space is represented by the seventy disciples and their interaction with each other and Jesus. Social space is where we experience belonging on a level that allows our relational interaction to involve

revealing some of who we are, what we think and how we feel. Social space is where we play “peek-a-boo” with the inner us. It is a place where we can experience spontaneous connections. Myers talks about three factors involved in social belonging:

First, it provides space for *neighbor relationships* . . . A neighbor is someone you know well enough to ask for small favors . . . These relationships bring to a neighborhood safety, comfort, and connectedness. Second, this social space provides a safe selection space for us to decide with whom we would like to grow a “deeper” relationship . . . Third, these interactions allow us to display a reality we create of who we are, while at the same time enabling others to “witness a sample of the process through which this reality was created over the months and years.” This helps others with their own process of self-discovery and definition.^x

Every year, our denominational tribe^{xi} puts on a Campus Ministries Convention for all of the campus chaplains and the student spiritual leaders of our colleges and universities in North America. The convention is a time to share, inspire, plan and learn. I was asked to lead out in one of the breakout sessions. So I decided to use InterPlace and the Circle of Belonging in an attempt to take the participants to a closer level of relationship than normally transpires in a setting like we were in. I wanted us to go past teaching and strategizing to being.

Here was the plan. I had asked several of my fellow campus chaplains to be facilitators for a group. There would be approximately 10 to 12 people in each group. For the first portion of their time together, the facilitator was to remain silent. The rest of the group was to “script” the facilitator’s life. As a whole, they were to make up the script—or story—of what they thought the facilitator’s life experience was like. Were they a nerd or jock in high school? What kind of music do they like? What are their passions, etc.?

After the group had done this for 15 minutes, the facilitator would tell them the real script of their life. In the majority of cases, the groups were hilariously off the mark! The participants were encouraged to explore what caused their preconceptions and talk about how these can color or prevent relationships and community. This was followed by everyone sharing on a topic such as what are their dreams, what do they fear or some common life experience that all could relate to. The result was that the group connectedness went from arms length to closer-to-the-heart. It allowed a door to open that allowed access to the possibility of personal space community.

Personal space takes us to a deeper interaction and connectedness with others. It goes past the more superficial and heads into the territory of the place where the “real you” resides. “Personal space is where we connect through sharing private . . . experiences, feelings, and thoughts. We call the people we connect with in this space ‘close friends.’ These are those who known more about us than an acquaintance would now and yet not so much that they feel uncomfortable.”^{xii}

In college, I had two tight friends, Tim and Jeff. We shared stories, adventures and life experiences. We talked about important things—girls, classes, future careers—but not the deep stuff. That is, until we went on adventure together camping in the desert. We set up camp in the rugged grandeur of the Red Rock Canyon area of the Mojave Desert located in Southern California. The rock formations were spectacular. We spent the day climbing them and exploring the twists and turns of the canyon.

That night under the vast star-studded sky, we sat around our campfire to warm our sore bodies. I don’t know if it was the solitude of the surroundings or the magical

dance of the flames of our fire, but something brought out conversations of personal inner questions and feelings. We connected in the space of “close friends” who were willing to live life more deeply together. Personal space is analogous to the twelve disciples and their relationship with Jesus.

The final space is where intimate belonging exists. This is the space of Peter, James and John with Jesus. Or, perhaps, it is best represented by the closeness of John (the Beloved) and Jesus. Joseph Myers describes it, “In intimate space, we share ‘naked’ experiences, feelings, and thoughts. Very few relationships are intimate. Intimate relationships are those in which another person knows the “naked truth” about us and yet the two of us are “not ashamed.”^{xiii} The reality is that very few of the relationships of our life reach this space of belonging. For most of us, this is the realm of our spouse, our family and, perhaps, one or two lifelong friends.

In his previous quote, Myers refers to the Creation account of Genesis 1. There we find that the nakedness and unashamed-ness of Adam and Eve reveals that their relationship with each other and with God was one of vulnerability, transparency and trust. For far too many of us, these three words represent the things we spend a lifetime building up walls to protect us from. What was the first thing that Adam and Eve did after their sin broke the Kingdom Community? They ran away, hid themselves and covered up. We’ve been running and hiding ever since.

I was in college and had only been dating my future wife, Marion, for a short while when I experienced one of the most terrifying moments of my life! I prided myself on my manliness. I was raised in the John Wayne era when the only emotions a man

showed was laughter, anger, and passion for a woman. You made sure that all of those “other” emotions were locked away safely behind the walls that your mind built.

What was my terrifying moment? The setting was in the student center. In one corner was a circular brick fireplace surrounded by a high-backed brick bench. It was secluded and romantic. There we sat. The firelight dancing. Marion and I talking and laughing. Then it happened! She looked intently at me with her big eyes and said, “I want to get to know you.” I smiled back and said, “I want to get to know you, too!” (This was working out great!) “No, no!”, she replied, “I want to get to know the you that you’re hiding deep inside.” Aaaaaagghhh! NOBODY had ever seen the “little, vulnerable me” that I thought I had safely hidden behind all the walls I had created! Yet she did. Through learning to love and trust her, she broke down those walls and helped me to learn what true belonging really means. And, through my relationship with my wife, I learned how to live in intimate space and belonging with God.

So what can we learn from the four spaces of community that will help us create the Circle of Belonging? We need to remember some absolutely crucial things. To start with, we’ve discovered that community and belonging happens at several levels and in several settings. When we go about the business of creating spaces for our Circle of Belonging, we need to be cognizant of and provide opportunities for each of the four spaces at different times and in different ways, and sometimes in the same setting.

Secondly, we must understand that not everyone has to occupy the space of intimate community! It is alright for people to find belonging in different spaces at different times!

Finally, and this one goes hand-in-hand with the previous ones, we need to let people know that they are welcome to develop as intimate of relationships with us as they are ready to. The space is always there for them. That's the model that Jesus left us. Some of His followers dove into deep relationship from the start. For others, it took more time. Amazingly, as revealed by the words of Matthew 28:16-17, it took some until even after His resurrection! "Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him—*but some of them still doubted!*"

God is willing to meet us where we are at in order to help us get to where we need to go. We need to be just as willing to do likewise with others. Perhaps here would be a good spot to remember an important insight and share some tips on how to maintain the four relational spaces. Here is the important insight: "The four relational spaces are not a process for growing healthy connections. Healthy community comes when we hold harmony among the spaces."^{xiv}

The Circle of Belonging is like an aquarium. You provide the space and the water, the plants and rocks, the lighting, the food, the filter, and the heater. The fish produce the fishy community. That thought leads into some "maintenance" tips. Tip #1: think of yourself as an *Environmentalist* versus a *Programmer*: "Environmentalists' practice restraint when it comes to controlling the results. They are primarily concerned with creating a 'healthy' climate for spontaneity to occur. They develop simple environmental parameters and then sit back to see what happens. 'Programmers,' on the other hand, take

control.^{xv} Programmers tend to program the life out of a space. Healthy safe spaces will result in spontaneous community networking and connecting.

Tip #2: View yourself as being a *Connector*. Let's return to Leonard Sweet's comments on connection: "The future belongs to the connectors, to those who can help people connect the lone and lonely dots of their lives and their world so that the big picture of wholeness and holiness can emerge. The gospel of Jesus Christ creates disciples with a two-word mission statement: 'Only Connect.'"^{xvi}

Some people are natural born connectors. Most of the time, you don't notice them because they do their work under the radar. Their passion is meeting and getting to know new people. Then they love to "connect the dots" of matching people with certain gifts, passions, and talents with others who need or can empower those qualities. The work of a connector is to meet, match and provide opportunities—spaces—for the individuals to naturally connect.

Tip #3: It's not about *Controlling*, but rather, it's about *Enabling*. You can't micro manage community. It is organic. Community "happens." Think of your role as one of being a midwife. You aren't the parent. You aren't the one that is giving birth. You are the one who is there to aid the mother in anyway possible to help her produce a healthy birth.

The early Celtic Church Community understood these concepts of spaces, belonging, community and engaging. Author Jerry C. Dougherty writes,

The intent was to make the community the ideal of what God wants and intends for the world, what Christians call God's kingdom. People were converted by belonging to the community. People were moved by example. The Celtic

missionaries loved the people, took time to know them, and showed them by example how to live the Christian way of life. If people are accepted and taken seriously and if our actions show the truth of our commitment then people will believe. People are moved by example; it is the most effective evangelism.^{xvii}

It is not a case of either being Modern and interested only in propositions and doctrinal correctness. Neither is it a case of being Postmodern and only concerned with relationships and experiences. The fact of the matter is that these mindsets and focuses are intermixed in our culture both in the past and in the present but with different emphasis. It also is not a case of being culturally relevant versus theological compromise for Christ immersed Himself into His culture and ours—that is the meaning of incarnation. It is a case of following Jesus.

The apostle John described Jesus in the following manner: “So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness” (John 1:14). Not proposition over relationship or vice versa. Rather the two merging together to breathe God’s breath of life into His Kingdom Community of love. InterPlace and the Circle of Belonging aren’t new innovations. Instead, they are just symbols and words that try to capture and restate the words of Jesus that call us to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind” and to “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37-40). Not an organization, but a community. Not rules but guided relationships. Not about building up walls but tearing them down. Not about fear but about love. When we find the InterPlace and form the Circle of Belonging, something wonderful and amazing happens—we find the heart of Jesus! When we find

and experience the heart of Jesus, something miraculous happens—His heart becomes ours!

Things have changed! Things are continuing to change at a pace that takes our breath away! We might not understand it. We might not like it. We might even want to fight it or hide from it. But the reality is that change is here—and Jesus is out there in it. And He's calling us to trust Him, come to Him where He's at and change the world! So, how about it? Are you ready step out and set sail on the wind of the Holy Spirit and make a journey of discovery? If so, then let's get started!

Notes

ⁱ <http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/europe/11/14/second.life.divorce/>

ⁱⁱ Virtual reality. Dictionary.com. *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004, [http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/virtual reality](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/virtual%20reality) (accessed December 16, 2008).

ⁱⁱⁱ Joseph R. Meyers, *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 6.

^{iv} Leonard Sweet, McLaren, Brian D. and Jerry Haselmayer, "*A*" *Is for Abductive: The Language of the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids, MI Zondervan, 2003). 75.

^v Kevin Kaiser made these remarks during a lecture at the Spiritual Leadership Institute, Houston, Texas in May, 2006.

^{vi} <http://itotd.com/articles/620/proxemics/>

^{vii} Meyers, 36.

^{viii} Ibid., 44.

^{ix} When we created BOND, we utilized several of the relational spaces. The mini-concert and the general service utilized public space. InterPlace involves social space. The buffet held the possibility to include public, social, and personal space.

^x Ibid., 46.

^{xi} I am a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Loma Linda University is a Seventh-day Adventist educational institution and is a part of an extensive worldwide system.

^{xii} Ibid., 50-51.

^{xiii} Ibid., 50.

^{xiv} Meyers, 107.

^{xv} Ibid., 73.

^{xvi} Leonard I. Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks: Living with a Grande Passion* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2007), 146.

^{xvii} J. C. Dougherty, *A Celtic Model of Ministry: The Reawakening of Community Spirituality* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2003), 107.

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