

A MISSIONAL INCARNATION OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP IN POSTMODERNITY

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PM723 WORSHIP IN AN EMERGING CULTURE

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## CONTENTS

|   |    |
|---|----|
| INTRODUCTION.....                                 | 1  |
| Chapter   |    |
| 1. AN EMERGING CULTURE.....                       | 3  |
| 2. A MISSIONAL ORIENTATION.....                   | 17 |
| 3. POSTMODERN WORSHIP VALUES.....                 | 25 |
| 4. MULTIPLE PARADIGMS OF BIBLICAL WORSHIP.....    | 29 |
| 5. SCRIPTURAL WARRANTS FOR POSTMODERN VALUES..... | 43 |
| 6. APPLICATION OF POSTMODERN PRINCIPLES.....      | 50 |
| 7. APPLICATION TO CURRENT SETTING.....            | 65 |
| 8. APPLICATION IN AN EMERGING CONGREGATION.....   | 76 |
| CONCLUSION.....                                   | 82 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY.....                                 | 84 |

## INTRODUCTION

Over the last 50 years, Western culture has changed dramatically. The Church has moved from the center of society to the fringe in both prominence and relevance. It faces the ironic challenge of shifting from sending missionaries to foreign cultures to becoming missionaries to its native culture. This paper presents principles for worship that addresses this challenge. They embrace the postmodern values of experience, participation, image richness and connectedness, and invite the multiple lenses of art, tradition, culture and time to inform our practices.

Though different from previous iterations of scripturally founded worship, there is scriptural warrant for these missional values. These values are found throughout scripture and are evident in the Last Supper. There are a number of different paradigms that inform different moments of worship within scripture. These different paradigms are manifested in a cacophony of Christian traditions that found themselves upon these particular scriptural moments. Inviting multiple lenses to inform our practices and quest for truth is both faithful to scripture and a corrective to the blinders of one particular paradigm.

Embracing multiple paradigms can be a missional bridge to our culture's changing approach to truth. While maintaining our belief in the existence of truth, we can embrace a method of discerning and discovering truth that engages multiple and sometimes contradictory viewpoints and paradigms.

This model for worship has a somewhat limited application to the author's Presbyterian, African-American congregation in Dallas, Texas. It addresses changes in

culture that have had less force in the south and in the African-American culture in particular. In so much as these changes are relevant to this particular congregation, it can be informed by this model. On the other hand, this model can be informed by this congregation as the lens of a particular culture and tradition.

The principles explored may best be implemented by a small missional outgrowth of a congregation in California that is seeking to incarnate Christian worship within postmodernity. This could be a missionally faithful form of worship for such a congregation set in our emerging culture.

## 1. AN EMERGING CULTURE

With a little reflection, a casual observer can deduce that American society has changed dramatically in the last fifty years. Values, taboos and mores have shifted substantially. Clothing, entertainment and profanity that would have been shameful in 1955 are now acceptable. Since the onset of the birth control pill which contributed to the sexual revolution, sexual activity outside of marriage has grown in practice and acceptance.

Gender roles have shifted. Women, once expected to remain in the home, have become an active part of the work force. As Tomlinson puts it, “Marriage is now seen much more as a partnership with decisions being shared... [We] assume sexual equality and take for granted the right of a woman to follow a career.”<sup>1</sup> In contrast to 1955, women are expected to have similar opportunities for career choice, advancement and pay as their male counterparts. Household roles have changed as well. Men are more often expected to take a larger role in raising their children. Traditional divisions of household chores are more likely to be negotiable.

Divorce has become a more acceptable behavior. People once inhibited by shame see it as a suitable alternative to an unhappy marriage. Family structures have changed. Single parent homes are more common. Grandparents are more likely to raise their grandchildren. Expectations and the reality of the family unit have changed. Family has changed from uniformly nuclear units to multiple and varied constellations.

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<sup>1</sup> Dave Tomlinson, *The Post-Evangelical* (London: Triangle, 1995), 37.

Since the Vietnam war protests, trust in authority has diminished in its various manifestations. The impact of the slogan “Question Authority” was not limited to the government. Trust has diminished in regards to many forms of authority from teachers in schools to police officers on the streets and pastors in the churches.

We are more globally connected and interdependent. “Globalization and expanded immigration have brought increased ethnic and cultural diversity to both the United States and to Canada.”<sup>2</sup> Advances in information technology from the satellite to the computer to the internet have created a much smaller world. In the last fifty years, news agencies have gained the ability to instantaneously bring a picture and a voice to stories from around the globe. We have also become more economically interdependent. We are dependent on a manufacturer in Korea, an international shipping industry and a global telecommunications network to supply the auto part at our corner auto store. American car companies build cars with parts made all over the world ordered shortly before they are needed, shipped and supplied to workers just before they are used. We are economically interdependent with people from various nations, cultures and languages.

The internet has revolutionized communication. We see the initial manifestations of this revolution. Personal and business communication has grown in speed, volume and shape. The internet has fostered a democratization of knowledge. A mother can now research at great length her child’s new illness. Her doctor is no longer her sole source of or authority for her information. In addition, it is changing the way we relate to one another.

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<sup>2</sup> Darrell L. Guder and Lois Barrett, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America, The Gospel and Our Culture Series* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1998), 45.

Dating sites, eBay auctions and blogs illustrate the internet bringing people together across previously inhibiting physical boundaries.

In addition, America has become a more pluralistic culture. Madonna says, “I go to synagogue, I study Hinduism... all paths lead to God,”<sup>3</sup> and actress Halle Barry states, “I believe in God. I just don’t know if that God is Jehovah, Buddha or Allah.”<sup>4</sup> Where there was one dominant religious choice, there are now many.

The United States is the most religiously diverse nation in the world.... The Immigration Act of 1965 eliminated the quotas linking immigration to national origins. Since the Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Jams, Zoroastrians, and new varieties of Jews and Catholics have arrived from every part of the globe, radically altering the religious landscape of the United States<sup>5</sup>.

The Christian faith has shifted from a normative source of spirituality to one among many acceptable sources of spirituality. A comparison of Bing Crosby – a beloved respected pastor – in *The Bells of St. Mary* in 1945 to Reverend Lovejoy – a meandering meaningless pastor – in *The Simpsons* of 2005 paints a picture of this change. As Eddie Gibbs writes in *Church Next*, “[T]he Church finds itself pushed out to the wings of the social stage.”<sup>6</sup> Once perceived to be at the center of society and culture both in prominence and significance, the Church has moved to the sidelines.

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<sup>3</sup> Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003), 67.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>5</sup> Diana L. Eck, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Now Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation*, 1st ed. ([San Francisco]: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Eddie Gibbs, *Churchnext: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 26.

## A Paradigm Shift

There is an even greater transformation underlying these particular changes. Walter Anderson writes in *The Truth about the Truth* that a much larger change, even a paradigm shift lies beneath these changes<sup>7</sup>. According to Stanly Grenz,

Many social observers agree that the Western world is in the midst of change. In fact, we are apparently experiencing a cultural shift that rivals the innovations that marked the birth of modernity out of the decay of the Middle Ages: We are in the midst of a transition from the modern to the postmodern era<sup>1, 8</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>See, e.g., Diogenes Alln, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World: The Full Wealth of Conviction* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), p2

The postmodern era is emerging, but it is nebulous and ill-defined. In fact, it is easier to identify what it is reacting against than to encapsulate it in a set of principles. Harvey and Anderson describe it as the situation in which the world finds itself after the breakdown of the enlightenment project, which underpinned the modern era<sup>9</sup>.

Before we go further, it would be valuable to note the distinction between postmodernity and postmodernism. The first is the time or condition in which we find ourselves. The second is a title for the various schools and movements that it has produced.<sup>10</sup> Postmodernism describes schools of philosophy, architecture and art that while connected to postmodernity are not synonymous with it. Postmodernity is the culture that has produced these schools. It can not be defined by nor contained within these manifestations. One might be tempted to look for the root causes and founding principles of postmodernity in

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<sup>7</sup> Walt Anderson, *The Truth About the Truth: De-Confusing and Re-Constructing the Postmodern World, A New Consciousness Reader* (New York: Putnam, 1995), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1996), 2.

<sup>9</sup> Anderson, *The Truth About the Truth: De-Confusing and Re-Constructing the Postmodern World*, 4.

postmodern philosophers such as Derrida, Foucault and Rorty. This would lead one astray, for while they are a product of postmodernity and have had an impact, particularly in the academic realm, their influence in the larger society is more limited. Their reaction to and deconstruction of modernity is significantly more extreme than that found in larger postmodernity. Though they are a manifestation of postmodernity, and have contributed to it, they do not define the underlying rationale for it.

### Modernity

Postmodernity is diverse, and some say centerless. Yet it is unified by its rejection of the assumptions of the enlightenment project which underpinned the modern era. If we wish to describe postmodernity, we must examine the assumptions it reacts against.

As Grenz describes, Francis Bacon set the stage for the Enlightenment with his vision of human kind mastering nature by discovering her secrets. Rene Descartes laid the philosophical foundation with his focus on doubt and his affirmation of Augustine's dictum, "cogito ergo sum." He thereby defined human nature as a thinking substance, and the person as an autonomous rational subject. Isaac Newton provided a scientific framework, picturing the world as a machine regulated by laws that could be discovered and understood by the human mind.<sup>11</sup>

Within this framework a number of assumptions were made. It was assumed that knowledge is certain, objective, good, and accessible to human beings. All of reality was subject to the scrutiny of reason. Emotion and intuition were set aside as pathways to truth. It was assumed that it was possible and desirable to be an objective observer thereby gaining

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 6.

access to this universal knowledge. The ideal observer evolved into a neutral specialist in a narrow field of study. Because knowledge was understood to be inherently good, progress was inevitable. It was assumed that every challenge would be solved through scientific discovery, and that this discovery, combined with education, would solve all social ills as well. With the elevation of reason and human freedom, all beliefs that limited this freedom or seemed to come from external authority were suspect.<sup>12</sup> According to Anderson and Harvey,

[The thinkers of the enlightenment project] took it as axiomatic that there was only one possible answer to any question. From this it followed that the world could be controlled and rationally ordered if we could only picture and present it rightly. But this presumed that there existed a single correct mode of representation which, if we could uncover it (and this is what scientific and mathematical endeavors were all about), would provide the means to Enlightenment's ends.<sup>13</sup>

#### Transition to Postmodernity

Lyotard, a French philosopher commissioned by the Council of Universities of Quebec in the late 1970s wrote in *The Postmodern Condition* that all modern systems of knowledge, including science, were dependent upon metanarratives, or grand discourses about the main direction of history. Metanarratives are stories of mythic proportions. They are large enough to unify and direct art, science, philosophy and politics. Lyotard cites examples of the Christian story of God's will being worked out in history, Marxism's clash of the social classes, and the Enlightenment's story of rational progress. He describes postmodernism as a time of incredulity toward metanarratives.

Metanarratives have fallen from favor. As Tomlinson describes,

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<sup>11</sup> Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

There is a consensus that this disillusionment with the great ‘epics’ of modernity can be traced back as far as World War I, which, with its unspeakable horrors, shattered the dream that scientific man could grasp his own destiny and create a utopia. Add to this the Holocaust and the bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and all the terrors which have followed and it is quite clear that the big epics have run out of credible storylines.<sup>5 14</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p32

Metanarratives also fell from favor in part because we were exposed to so many of them. When people lived in relatively isolated communities, they experienced and operated within a single metanarrative. As exposure to multiple cultures, traditions and beliefs grew we became more and more uncomfortable with the claim of any one metanarrative to authoritatively and exclusively describe reality. Lyotard said there are lots of centers, and none of them holds up. We encounter diverse and contradictory fragments of stories and the arts and the sciences go their various ways<sup>15</sup>.

People of the pre-modern world did not have to encounter pluralism in their daily lives. People of the modern era had the hope of universality guaranteed them by the inevitable progress of dispassionate rationality, but instead they encountered pluralism. People of the postmodern era have put universality itself into question. As Anderson explains, “Postmodernity, then, is the age of over-exposure to otherness.”<sup>16</sup> Western culture has witnessed the narratives of Marxism, Capitalism, Freudianism, Christianity, Islam and a

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<sup>13</sup> Anderson, *The Truth About the Truth: De-Confusing and Re-Constructing the Postmodern World*, 4.

<sup>14</sup> Tomlinson, *The Post-Evangelical*, 77.

<sup>15</sup> Jean Franđcois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, Theory and History of Literature; V. 10* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.

great number of others competing to become the dominant narrative. Through international travel, increased immigration, and expanded communication and interaction, Western society has experienced the competing narratives of multiple cultures. It has become difficult to stand within any one paradigm and claim the exclusive authority to interpret reality. Anderson states, “We are living in a new world, a world that does not know how to define itself by what it is, but only by what it has just-now ceased to be.”<sup>17</sup>

## Postmodern Assumptions

### Rejection of Objectivity

Modernity assumed that knowledge was objectively accessible by dispassionate rational observation. In contrast, postmodernity rejects the notion that any individual is capable of such objectivity.<sup>18</sup> Rather, it assumes that all are conditioned and therefore limited by their culture. The paradigms in which we operate are blinders. They direct us to particular questions and affect our discovery by the limitations of their assumptions. Further, we are not able to discern our bias, for we are not able to look from outside of ourselves. In contrast to modernity’s faith in access to certain knowledge, postmodernity assumes that all discovery of knowledge is affected, limited and directed by time, place and culture. Even if truth is certain, we can not be certain of our access to it. As Tomlinson describes, “People are suspicious of certainty and distrust claims of objectivity.”<sup>19</sup> This compels us to humility regarding truth claims. It obliges an admission that we are limited in our understanding by

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<sup>16</sup> Anderson, *The Truth About the Truth: De-Confusing and Re-Constructing the Postmodern World*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 8.

the unconscious paradigms in which we operate. It obliges us to openness toward new paradigms, for even if they are contradictory with our own and with each other, they avail us of windows to discovery that were not available through a single paradigm.

### **Holism**

Modernity exalted rationality as the pathway to the discovery of truth to the exclusion of emotion and intuition. In contrast, postmodernity embraces a holism which integrates all dimensions of personal life, including our affective, intuitive and cognitive selves. Where the modern person sought to be a rational autonomous individual, the postmodern person seeks to be a “whole” person. This holism acknowledges a broader connection to that which lies beyond our selves, including nature and community.<sup>20</sup> Postmodern epistemology not only rejects the dispassionate rational observer as a possible discernor of truth, but considers it an inappropriately limiting means to discovering truth. The postmodern truth seeker embraces the value of aesthetics and beauty, of emotion and spiritual encounter, and of dialogue and relationship.

### **Pessimism Regarding Discovery**

Where modernity assumed all knowledge was good, postmodernity assumes knowledge is neutral at best. Discovery and the application of technological advances are not wholly positive. With the invention of the steam shovel humanity discovered the ability to make spectacular changes to the world, both constructively providing for human need and destructively altering the earth beyond repair. The discovery of atomic energy led to both

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<sup>19</sup> Tomlinson, *The Post-Evangelical*, 78.

<sup>20</sup> Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 14.

the constructive source for energy and the destructive effects of nuclear contamination and a weapon that threatens to undo humanity. As Grenz describes, “Postmoderns have not sustained the optimism that characterized previous generations. To the contrary, they evidence a gnawing pessimism.”<sup>21</sup> Where modernity trusted in the inevitability of progress, postmodernity is weary of the unforeseen affects of knowledge.

### **Community vs. Universal**

In contrast to modernity’s search for universal truths that transcend time and culture, postmodernity operates within a community based understanding of truth. What one believes and even the way in which one believes is assumed to be determined by one’s community.<sup>22</sup> Restated, truth is relative to one’s community. There are two consequences of this. First, the community is the primary locus for the discovery and discernment of truth. In modernity, the dispassionate rational observer with mastery of a very narrow field of study was perceived to be in an ideal position for the discovery of truth. In postmodernity, the holistic person connected to a community interacting, interrelating and working out that truth within her community is in a better position to discern truth. Truth or knowledge that does not work within one’s particular community is of little value. The postmodern person values “relevance” in a way the modern person did not.

Second and more radically, relativity extends beyond one’s perceptions of the truth to the essence of truth. Truth itself is relative to one’s community. This is perhaps the most unpalatable facet of postmodernity for the Church. At the least, postmodernity affirms the possibility that there are multiple contradictory truths. At the most, it fully rejects the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 7.

possibility that there is absolute truth or anything that is true for every time and community. As Tomlinson describes it, “It is perfectly valid for you to have your story, your version of truth, just so long as you do not try to force it on anyone else. The unforgivable sin is to behave as though you have cornered the market on truth.”<sup>23</sup>

### Postmodern Values

It is still early in the process of discerning and discovering what is valued in postmodernity. As it is still a moving target, we look to forecasters to give their best understanding at the moment of the postmodern condition. Leonard Sweet, who is such a culture forecaster and prominent Christian writer on postmodernity, lectured to Grace Presbytery in 2003. He presented the four adjectives “experiential, participatory, image-rich and connective” forming the acronym EPIC.<sup>24</sup> While he described this list as a new epistemology, they might be better described as four significant postmodern values. Rather than a philosophy of the acquisition or the nature of knowledge these describe what postmodernity values. Let us look at each of these values as they are expressed in postmodernity.

### Experience

The rise of Starbucks illustrates the value of experience in postmodernity. Starbucks stores provide more than carefully made beverages; they offer a carefully crafted experience. They provide an aesthetically tailored space. Every element that makes up each store fits

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>23</sup> Tomlinson, *The Post-Evangelical*, 78.

<sup>24</sup> Leonard Sweet, Lecture Before Grace Presbytery at Austin College. Sherman Texas. November 18, 2003

into a style that provides a unique, aesthetically desirable experience. Though an espresso drink cost as much as four dollars, their product is appreciated as a value significant enough to drive the demand that has spread Starbucks across the country and around the world.

### **Participation**

The value of participation is illustrated in the rise of blogging (or web logging). As a tool, the internet could be used in any number of ways, and yet people choose to use it in a participatory fashion. Rather than limiting their activity to gathering information from corporate sites, people are publishing their own opinions and interacting in communities of bloggers as they comment on one another's blogs and link to each other. This rise of participatory blogging has become a force that threatens media figures and influences political campaigns.

### **Image-Richness**

The value of image-richness is illustrated in the advertising industry. Where persuasive words in the form of a slogan, song or argument were effectively used in the 1950s to sell products, they have been replaced today by images. Advertisers use images of celebrities and of the experiences they wish to associate with their product. Product names are becoming less prominent than logos. A Nike commercial ends with the Nike swoosh rather than the brand name. Where the printed word was valued in modernity, images, icons and symbols are becoming a prominent medium for communication in postmodernity.

## Connectedness

Sweet illustrates postmodernity's value of connectedness with the rise of reality shows and online dating sites.<sup>25</sup> This value fits with the previous descriptions of the emphasis on community and the connected individual in opposition to modernity's value of the rational autonomous individual.

### An Organic Paradigm

Modernity embraced a reductionist, Newtonian, mechanical model for understanding the world. It assumed that psychology and sociology would one day be explained by biology, which would be explained by chemistry, which would be explained by physics, reducing all of reality to a set of simple universal principles. In contrast, postmodernity embraces an organic paradigm. Dan Kimball affirms Dave Tomlinson, when he writes,

The postmodern world is a world which understands itself through biological rather than mechanistic models; a world where people see themselves as belonging to the environment rather than over it or apart from it. A world distrustful of institutions, hierarchies, centralized bureaucracies and male dominated organizations.<sup>26</sup>

Postmodernity expects the world to be chaotic, interconnected and incomprehensibly complex. In contrast to the rationally structured, hierarchical institution, it seeks structures that are formed organically.

### An Emerging Culture

Western society has changed dramatically over the last fifty years. In the wake of the failure of the Enlightenment project and an increasing exposure to otherness, we have entered

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations*, 54.

the era of postmodernity. Postmodernity is marked by new assumptions. It embraces an epistemology that values community, holism, connectedness to nature, aesthetics, emotion and intuition. Truth is assumed to be relative to one's community in access, if not in essence. In contrast to modernity, postmodernity values aesthetic experience, participation, image-richness and connectivity. Through the lens of an organic rather than mechanical model, postmodernity understands the world to be complex, interconnected and chaotic. This is the emerging culture in which the American Church finds itself.

## 2. A MISSIONAL ORIENTATION

When Leslie Newbigin returned to England in 1975 from over thirty years of missionary evangelism in India, he discovered that the Christian nation that had sent him in missions in 1936 had itself become a mission field.

<sup>27</sup> This post-Christian England was now “much harder than anything I met in India. The cold contempt for the Gospel is harder to face than opposition.”<sup>28</sup> Newbigin threw down the gauntlet, calling for the Church to become missionaries to our present Western culture.

The Church used to exist within Christendom. Western society was Christian. People born within Christian states were members of the state church by fact of their birth. As Guder describes, America, while not having a state Church, could be described as being within “functional Christendom.”<sup>29</sup> Mission within Christendom took place when the Church within Christendom sent missionaries out to foreign lands to spread Christianity. Within the local context, the Church was able to live out its role as the salt of the earth and the light of the world by focusing on those within its walls. As society as a whole was Christian, most people were already in a church. Evangelism was geared toward those who had recently moved and were looking to connect to a new congregation. There were some who were not Christians, but even these lived within the larger Christian society. They were familiar with Christian doctrine. They lived under the expectation that they should attend a church, and

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>28</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda: An Autobiography* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1985), 249.

that they should bring their children to a Sunday school, at least to teach them values. In the local context, being missionally faithful meant inviting people to come inside the walls of a local congregation. When every local congregation did this, the local context was well ministered to.

Christendom fell. Western culture is no longer Christian in fact or in name. The Church is no longer the normative center of society. The Church which once sent missionaries to foreign lands now discovers itself within a mission field. This new setting dramatically changes the role of the local congregation. In the past, a church sent and supported missionaries abroad. Now it needs to engage the mission field in which it is planted. Charles Van Engen in *God's Missionary People* argues passionately for the church to embrace a missional ecclesiology. He urges local churches to become missionary outposts, God's Kingdom in their local context. "[T]his means that missionary congregations live out their spiritual life not only as the Church, but also as God's people in the world, as a force to transform society"<sup>30</sup>

If the local congregation wishes to continue to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world within its immediate context, it must shift from an inward to an outward orientation. It must shift from inviting people to become members and then ministering to them to carrying out God's mission in the external community.

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<sup>29</sup> Guder and Barrett, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, 48.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Edward van Engen, *God's Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1991), 115.

### Engaging our Culture?

When the church embraces this mandate, how does it engage the culture around it? On the one hand, everyone within the church interacts daily with the culture in which they live. On the other hand, the church exists as a subculture that is out of step with larger Western society.<sup>31</sup> We as the Church have tended to be reactionary rather than missional. Instead of engaging the culture in which we exist, we have been prone to long for the return of 1954. Rather than incarnate the body of Christ within our present culture, we tend to stand against the culture and chastise the deterioration of society.

Should the church seek to be relevant to the culture in which it exists? On the one hand, the Church must always be distinct from the world in which it exists. We must, for instance, be distinct in the way that we treat one another, as our love for one another is a witness to the power of Christ within our community. On the other hand, we can not be the body of Christ incarnate to this culture if we do not become part of this culture. Christ came into our world and entered a particular time and place. So we as the church should be incarnational. We should be the body of Christ manifested within the culture of our mission field.

One might argue that the church should be wholly distinct from culture, that the culture within the church should be formed only by scripture. This argument would be stronger if it were possible for any church to remain distinct from its culture. As Jesus' ministry was historically grounded in the particular time and place of first century Palestine, so every congregation is historically grounded. The church is not, nor can it be, an acultural manifestation of the body of Christ. The church of 1955 was culturally distinct from the

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<sup>31</sup> Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations*, 82-83.

church of 1055, and the churches of 555, and 55. Arguing that we should not seek to be relevant to our present culture suggests that we should remain a manifestation of a culture that has past rather than be the body of Christ incarnated within our present world. When we argue that we should not pander to the postmodern culture in which we exist we are in fact defending the continuation of the church that is a startling manifestation of the American culture of 1955.

Brian McLaren in *The Church on the Other Side* said, “If you have a new world, you need a new church. You have a new world.”<sup>32</sup> If we desire to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, we must become an incarnation of the body of Christ engaging our postmodern culture.

How does the church manifest itself within the culture if we are not yet members of the culture? If the Church is more an enclave of 1954, how do we gain a missional understanding of the world in our midst? Two groups are rising to meet this challenge. One group is the scholars and writers like Guder in the Gospel in our Culture Network, and Sweet. Another group is the younger leaders who have grown up in postmodernity and who are forming an emerging church.

When Christian immigrants come to America they predictably form ethnic churches. These churches are enclaves of their home culture. They worship in their native language. They eat their traditional foods and pattern the structures of their congregation after those of their native culture. Within a few years, these churches struggle to minister to their increasingly American children with whom they have less and less in common. Continuing

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<sup>32</sup> Brian D. McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: ZondervanPublishingHouse, 2000), 11.

their ethnic language worship, they often begin English ministries for their children. These ministries differ initially in language, but change in style and content to engage the culture of the youth to which they minister. The second generation immigrants demand and/or create ministries that meet their needs as members of a people bridging to a new culture.

So too, we the Church have witnessed emerging ministries formed by the children of the modern Church who have modern parents but who grew up in postmodernity. As we seek to engage our culture, these young leaders are a valuable resource.

### Postmodern Christian Leaders

Tomlinson uses the provocative term post-Evangelicals to describe these new Christian leaders. In a striking similarity to the second generation immigrants of an ethnic church, these post-Evangelicals, he believes, begin their journey out of an irritation with the evangelical culture of their parent's church.<sup>33</sup> He describes the frustration he and these young leaders have with the way Evangelicals have accommodated middle class values. He affirms Walter who says, "By focusing their attention on gambling or drink, they ignore the way in which they have unconsciously absorbed their neighbour's views on virtually everything else. They strain at a gnat and swallow a whole cultural mule."<sup>34</sup> Walking away from the modern culture embodied in the church, Tomlinson formed a Christian community called "Holy Joes" which met in the lounge bar of a South London pub on Tuesday nights. .

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<sup>33</sup> Tomlinson, *The Post-Evangelical*, 31.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-34.

Webber calls these leaders who grew up in postmodernity ‘younger Evangelicals’. To contrast them from leaders of the past, he distinguishes between traditional, pragmatic and younger Evangelicals. A summary of his analysis can be seen in table 1.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Robert Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2002), 16-18.

Table 1. Traditional, Pragmatic and Younger Evangelicals

|                               | <b>Traditional Evangelicals<br/>1950-1975</b>         | <b>Pragmatic Evangelicals<br/>1975-2000</b>   | <b>Younger Evangelicals<br/>2000-</b>   |
|-------------------------------|---|---|---|
| <b>Leader</b>                 | <b>Billy Graham</b>                                   | <b>Bill Hybels</b>  | <b>Brian McLaren</b>  |
| <b>Communication Style</b>    | <b>Print<br/>Verbal</b>                               | <b>Broadcast<br/>Presentation</b>   | <b>Internet<br/>Interactive</b>   |
| <b>Theological Commitment</b> | <b>Christianity as a<br/>rational worldview</b>       | <b>Christianity as<br/>therapy<br/>Answers needs</b>                                  | <b>Christianity as a<br/>community of faith<br/>Ancient/Reformation</b>         |
| <b>Apologetic Style</b>       | <b>Evidential<br/>Foundational</b>                    | <b>Christianity as<br/>meaning-giver<br/>Experiential<br/>Personal faith</b>          | <b>Embrace the<br/>metanarrative<br/>Embodied apologetic<br/>Communal faith</b> |
| <b>Ecclesial Paradigm</b>     | <b>Constantinian<br/>church<br/>Civil Religion</b>    | <b>Culturally<br/>sensitive church<br/>Market driven</b>                              | <b>Missional Church<br/>Countercultural</b>                                     |
| <b>Church Style</b>           | <b>Neighborhood<br/>churches<br/>Rural</b>            | <b>Megachurch<br/>Suburban<br/>Market driven</b>                                      | <b>Small church<br/>Back to cities<br/>Intercultural</b>                        |
| <b>Leadership Style</b>       | <b>Pastor Centered</b>                                | <b>Managerial model<br/>CEO</b>   | <b>Team ministry<br/>Priesthood of all</b>                                      |
| <b>Youth Ministry</b>         | <b>Church-centered<br/>programs</b>                   | <b>Outreach<br/>programs<br/>Weekend fun<br/>retreats</b>                             |   |
| <b>Education</b>              | <b>Sunday school<br/>Information<br/>centered</b>     | <b>Target<br/>generational<br/>groups and needs</b>                                   | <b>Intergenerational<br/>formation in<br/>community</b>                         |
| <b>Spirituality</b>           | <b>Keep the rules</b>                                 | <b>Prosperity and<br/>success</b>   | <b>Authentic<br/>embodiment</b>   |
| <b>Worship</b>                | <b>Traditional</b>                                    | <b>Contemporary</b>   | <b>Convergence</b>  |
| <b>Art</b>                    | <b>Restrained</b>                                     | <b>Art as illustration</b>  | <b>Incarnational<br/>embodiment</b>   |
| <b>Evangelism</b>             | <b>Mass evangelism</b>                                | <b>Seeker service</b>   | <b>Process evangelism</b>   |
| <b>Activists</b>              | <b>Beginning of<br/>evangelical social<br/>action</b> | <b>Need-driven social<br/>action (i.e., divorce<br/>groups, drug<br/>rehab, etc.)</b> | <b>Rebuild cities and<br/>neighborhoods</b>                                     |

Webber makes a clear case that these younger leaders are operating in a new paradigm. They are not simply applying contemporary ideas to the programs of the

pragmatist's era. They are forming new concepts of ministry based on a postmodern epistemology and postmodern values. Because of this, they are a resource to us as we seek to incarnate Christian worship within postmodernity.

### 3. POSTMODERN WORSHIP VALUES

Having identified a group of postmodern Christian leaders, we turn to explore what values undergird their worship. Examining a collection of postmodern ministries we find several common values.<sup>36</sup> While framed in different ways by different groups, the values expressed in these worship gatherings are closely related to and can be categorized within the values that were noted earlier to be held by broader postmodernity.

#### Incorporating other Paradigms

A number of postmodern worship gatherings looks to previous eras for liturgy and faith practices. Dan Kimball's ministry is called Vintage Christianity and it intentionally looks to pre-modern forms of Christianity to inform its worship. So too, Solomon's Porch incorporates forms of worship from other eras.<sup>37</sup>

#### Experiential

Postmodern worship gatherings are holistic experiences. They engage not just the intellect, but the whole being. There is a multi-sensory approach to worship. Some have returned to the New Testament practice of sharing a meal together before their formal gathering starts. Aesthetics are valued. Care is taken to create a sacred space. People have the opportunity to move freely within the worship space. Care is taken in creating an

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<sup>36</sup> Dan Kimball, *Emerging Worship: Creating New Worship Gatherings for Emerging Generations* (El Cajon, CA: Grand Rapids, MI: EmergentYS; Zondervan, 2004), 73-95.

<sup>37</sup> Doug Pagitt, *Reimagining Spiritual Formation: A Week in the Life of an Experimental Church* (El Cajon, CA: Grand Rapids, MI: emergentYS Books; Zondervan, 2003), 57.

atmosphere that is often designed to be intimate and informal, as the house church of the New Testament.

### Participatory

Kimball makes a particular point to note the shift from worshippers being attendees who come to receive to participants adding to worship. He argues that worship events be described as worship gatherings rather than worship services, which he believes has shifted in meaning from an offering of our services to coming to be serviced- filled up as at a service station.<sup>38</sup> A worship participant in an emerging worship gathering can expect opportunities to participate personally in the experience, whether that be in dialogue, or movement around the room to stations of activity, or moments of quiet for personal meditation.<sup>39</sup>

### Image Rich

These gatherings make use of imagery in a way not valued by modern churches. Art is often used as means of expression, rather than an illustration. Art is used as a doorway to understanding scripture. Icons are used to give people an opportunity for transcendent experience. Video is used to create ambience, or as an expressive piece together with scripture. Emerging gatherings are making use of the visual image that postmodernity values.

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<sup>38</sup> Kimball, *Emerging Worship: Creating New Worship Gatherings for Emerging Generations*, 3.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

### Connective

The worship gathering is the outflow of the community. In contrast to the anonymous experience of the seeker sensitive Megachurch worship, these gatherings are highly relational. As noted before, the space is often designed to be intimate. Kimball promotes a house church structure, in which most worship gatherings would be smaller intimate events. Monthly, all of the churches would gather for larger worship experiences.

### Holistic Approach to Scripture

A Postmodern approach to truth values knowledge beyond propositional statements. Emerging gatherings therefore emphasize scripture as narrative. Kimball describes preaching as an invitation to take part in the story of scripture. There is a renewed appreciation for mystery. Sermons are more likely to provoke thought and leave questions than provide simplified answers.

### Organic Organization

Emerging worship gatherings, while ordered and planned, tend not to follow a rigid, linear, predictable formula. A sermon, for instance, may come in separate pieces interwoven with other interactions with scripture in any particular gather time<sup>40</sup>.

### Postmodern Worship Values

Looking for direction from these postmodern leaders, we find they are forming ministries that express postmodernity's values. They incorporate other paradigms. They're

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 77.

experiential, participatory, image rich, connective and organic in structure. Next we will consider whether it is biblically warranted to consider worship in this new paradigm.

#### 4. MULTIPLE PARADIGMS OF BIBLICAL WORSHIP

It is important to establish that there is more than one biblically faithful paradigm of worship. Throughout scripture we see various forms of worship appropriate for the various times and places in which people lived. In addition, there have been many divergent manifestations of biblically grounded worship practiced across time and cultures. Each of these worship traditions has approached scripture through a particular paradigm appropriate to their setting. They each draw on particular parts of scripture or on a particular paradigm of interpretation of the whole of scripture as a basis for their form of worship. And yet, each of these traditions, though often contradictory, is faithful and biblically grounded when examined through the framework in which that tradition operates. It is appropriate therefore that in seeking to be a credible manifestation of the Church within this culture we would approach scripture seeking warrants for worship formed within the values of this culture.

In contrast to this position, Michael Horton presents in *A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of God-Centered Worship* a very narrow and reactionary description of biblical worship. He states,

God has promised to save and keep his people through the means he has appointed and through no others; the ordinary means of grace are limited to the preached Word and the administered sacraments; God's rationale for these means is made explicit in Scripture.<sup>41</sup>

Horton operates within and is in fact a striking manifestation of the paradigm of early Reformed theology. Within a covenant framework, he describes worship as a “weekly

covenant renewal ceremony.”<sup>42</sup> He encourages the Church to restore the drama of retelling the story of God’s salvation history, and reenacting the covenant between God and God’s people. Citing the incarnation as a significant accommodation to our weakness, he asks “Isn’t it a bit arrogant therefore, for us to respond to this gracious condescension by asking, ‘But what about the teenagers? How can we make the gospel relevant to people today?’”<sup>43</sup>

Where this paper proposes a missional incarnation of the church within this culture, Horton in contrast indicts postmodern culture. In a reactionary fashion, he writes, “What used to be called multiple personalities disorder... is no longer regarded as pathological but as the normal key in which the score of postmodern life is played.” He regards postmoderns as “Proteon voyagers.” Here he refers to the Greek myth of Proteus, a deity who could change into a dragon, fire or flood at will. The only effective way of dealing with Proteus was to chain him up. Horton states that postmoderns reinvent themselves, denying God as the creator and redeemer of selves.<sup>44</sup> He claims they “are searching frantically for a narrative large enough to give some purpose to their lives.” He argues that we must chain up these Proteons by setting them into the larger story of scripture. Rather than operate within the postmodern epistemology and values of this culture, Horton demeans them. Rather than recognize the limitations of the paradigms we operate within, Horton passionately argues that postmodern people must be incorporated into his own Reformed paradigm. He argues against innovation of any kind, writing, “What we desperately need to hear in our day of teeming methods and techniques for ‘inducing’ revival is that the Holy Spirit does not work

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<sup>41</sup> Michael Scott Horton, *A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of God-Centered Worship* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2002), 29.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

apart from the ordinary means that he has established in his freedom.”<sup>45</sup> Blind to the limitations of his own paradigm, he argues that all of scripture should be read through the lens of a “redemptive-historical” interpretation.<sup>46</sup> He thus calls for the exclusion of all other perspectives, and constricts all the revelation of scripture to his topic of inquiry. Moreover, he argues that his method of incorporating people into the story of God is the only biblically faithful model for worship.

In contrast to Horton’s depiction of one monolithic, biblically faithful form of worship, Kimball argues, “There is more than one way to worship God in a church gathering. We need to recognize and celebrate that! In fact, many forms of worship emerged throughout biblical history.”<sup>47</sup> Kimball recounts the following numerous forms of worship in scripture.<sup>48</sup> Yoshiaki Hattori fills in some of the academic detail of these forms.<sup>49</sup>

#### Multiple Biblical Forms of Worship

In the pre-patriarchal period, we see the first worship in the garden. “The first man and woman simply responded to the divine provision, maintaining the right and normal relationship with God the Creator.”<sup>50</sup> In Genesis 4, the brothers Cain and Abel had an

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

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>47</sup> Kimball, *Emerging Worship: Creating New Worship Gatherings for Emerging Generations*, 6.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 7-9.

<sup>49</sup> D. A. Carson and World Evangelical Fellowship. Faith and Church Study Unit., *Worship: Adoration and Action* (Grand Rapids, Mich. Carlisle, UK: Published on behalf of the World Evangelical Fellowship by Baker Book House; Paternoster Press, 1993), 21.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 22.

established form of worship. Abel gave God fat portions from the firstborn of his flock and Cain, though God did not receive it with favor, gave some of the fruits of the soil.

In Genesis 8:20, another form of worship emerged after the flood. Noah built an altar to the Lord and taking some of the clean animals sacrificed them burning them, as an offering whose aroma pleased the Lord. According to Hattori, “Although one may well imagine that there was some kind of altar for the offerings of Cain and Abel, no such details surface in the biblical text.”<sup>51</sup>

Sacrifice is more prominent in the patriarchal period.<sup>52</sup> In Genesis 13:18 Abraham built an altar to the lord, creating a sacred space and a memorial symbol of worship. “Several patriarchal sites clearly served as sanctuaries at least until the temple was built in Jerusalem: e.g. Gilgal (Josh. 5:7-12), Shiloh (Josh. 18:1-10), Mizpah (Judg. 20:1-3; 21:1-8), Gibeon (1 Chron. 16:39; 21:29)”<sup>53</sup>

In Genesis 28:18-22 another form emerges when Jacob takes the stone he had laid his head upon, stands it up and pours oil on it. He calls the stone God’s house.

The tabernacle later became a sacred space for worship. It moved with the people and provided several courts for worship. These spaces were furnished for worship with the Ark of the Covenant, the table of showbread and the lamp stand. It had an altar for the sacrifice of animals. According to Hattori, other patriarchal elements of worship included circumcision as a sign of God’s covenant, prostrating oneself, acknowledging the need for

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

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

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

God's intervention, and thanking God for God's goodness.<sup>54</sup> Hattori is able to define a patriarchal pattern of worship distinct from those preceding and following.

At the time of the exodus, we see the clear development of music in worship, God's provision for the Sabbath rest and the establishment of the priestly line. As Hattori describes, there seemed to be a need of preparation for theophany. The Israelites were to be clean and holy. People experienced the theophany with visible phenomena and audible words.<sup>55</sup>

Later, the temple was built as a dim reflection of the heavenly court. This ushered a new era of temple worship. In Malachi 1:10-11 a new worship is proclaimed that will be not in the temple but everywhere with incense and pure offerings brought to God.

Hattori marks distinct manifestations of worship during the times of conquest, the time of monarchy, the time of the divided monarchy, and the time of the exile. "Almost inevitably, as the 'covenant of redemption' unfolds, the people of God responded in patterns of worship that changed over time."<sup>56</sup>

In the New Testament, Jesus introduced new concepts in worship, teaching that worship is not tied to a location or space. Rather, true worship is done in spirit and truth (John 4:21-24). At Pentecost, a new worship form appeared as our bodies became temples of the Holy Spirit. Our entire lives became acts of worship.

Kimball recounts,

The practice of gathering at the temple for rituals and complex sacrifices moved to the simplicity of gathering in people's homes (1 Corinthians 16:19, Colossians 4:15, Philemon 2.) Each church gathered to share a meal, sing, read Scripture and pray. The New Testament 'worship service' (worship gathering) became very simplistic. There were no pulpits, no 45-minute four-point sermons, no

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 49.

worship bands, no ushers. Instead, everyone was prepared to participate. They set aside time for singing, teaching, discussion and the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:17-34.) They also gave each other a holy kiss (1 Corinthians 16:20).<sup>57</sup>

### Multiple Paradigms of Worship

In addition to the multiple settings, forms and practices of worship explored by Kimball and Hattori, Lang describes multiple paradigms of worship in the Psalms. He argues that the psalmist's ascribed praise to three separate gods, a personal, a national and a creator god. He suggests that these three gods were worshiped in a pre-canonical polytheistic Israel before the adoption of a monotheistic faith. We do not favor Lang's view that Israel worshipped three gods. However, he does establish three independent paradigms of praise each addressing a different image of God.<sup>58</sup> Further, he describes three continuing traditions in the church that operate within each of these paradigms. Christians worship the national form of God when they recount his mighty acts. They worship the personal form of God when they testify to God's dealing in the individual's life. They worship the creator God when "the congregation in its most solemn liturgies joins the angelic choirs in their hymnic adoration."<sup>59</sup>

### Worship of the God of Redemptive History

The first paradigm of worship Lang finds in practice at St. Michael's Convent. In this form, worship is directed toward an image of God who has acted in mighty ways throughout

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<sup>57</sup> Kimball, *Emerging Worship: Creating New Worship Gatherings for Emerging Generations*, 8.

<sup>58</sup> Bernhard Lang, *Sacred Games: A History of Christian Worship* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 26.

the unfolding of God's redemptive history. Horton's description of worship as a re-enactment of the covenant fits within this paradigm. This image of God is somewhat distant in so much as it is an image of God who works mighty deeds for the whole of his people in the grand sweep of history, over and against the individual in day to day life.

Lang notes communion liturgies as examples of this worship that retell the whole of the salvation story, beginning with creation, then the covenant, the release from the bondage of Egypt, the prophets, Jesus life, death and resurrection.<sup>60</sup> In five daily offices, the sisters living at St. Michael's convent pattern their worship, and their whole lives, around the recitation of the story of God's mighty acts.

The nuns of Paderborn have of course not invented the daily commemoration of events from the sacred story and their association with the canonical hours; they simply subscribe to a tradition that reflects the monastic imagination of both antiquity and the Middle Ages.... The *Golden Legend* finds for each of the canonical hours a multiplicity of biblical events. Monks and nuns cannot help but be constantly reminded of the sacred story for whose events they praise the Lord.<sup>61</sup>

Through these five daily offices, the yearly calendar, and the selections of readings, the nuns in an hourly, daily, and yearly pattern ascribe praise to the God of redemptive history by reciting the mighty deeds of God's salvation history.

### **Worship of the Personal God**

The second paradigm of worship Lang finds manifest in the Puritan relation and Evangelical testimony-giving. This form of worship ascribes praise to a personal image of God who is active in an individual's daily life. He notes the rise of this ascription in the Puritan church. In 1562, at the request of the Puritans, a special section was added to the

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 29.

book of common worship for the ascription of praise at the completion of someone's life.<sup>62</sup> Further, he notes that in the 1630s it was the practice of those who wished to join a particular Puritan congregation to have to come before the ruling council and give an account "about their spiritual life: their struggle with sin, their calling by God, and their gradual conversion to the true faith in God."<sup>63</sup> This story telling became more popular and eventually they began sharing their testimonies before the whole congregation. Lang traces the continuation of this tradition through the Moravians and Methodists in the eighteenth century. He follows this testimony-giving form of praise ascribed to a personal God who interacts with the individual in daily life as a dominant influence within the evangelical church. The emphasis on the image of God as the personal God who interacts on a daily basis saving the individual can be seen not only throughout this form of worship but throughout the theology and practice of evangelical faith.

### **Worship of the Creator God on the Throne**

The third paradigm of worship Lang finds in hymnic adoration. This form of worship ascribes praise to the transcendent and holy Creator God. This image of God is best located outside the realm of time and creation in the heavenly throne room. "While expression of praise is motivated by creation ('for you created all things'), any reference to specific acts on behalf of human beings is absent. We are in heaven, not on earth!"<sup>64</sup> As such, this form of worship seeks to join the celestial choirs of the heavenly court, ascribing praise in hymnic and transcendent beauty. John Chrysostom argued that it was legitimate for humans to join

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 35,36.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 46.

the heavenly choirs because ‘Christ has removed the separating wall [between heaven and earth] ... and made one realm of the two.’<sup>65</sup> According to Cardinal Ratzinger, true liturgical worship never takes the measure of the particular congregation as its measure and focus, but rather takes a cosmic and universal perspective. “In Praising God himself, then, people step as it were outside the history of salvation and the confines of social groups in order to enter the realm of the absolute, the realm of heaven.”<sup>66</sup>

The most typical hymn of this form of worship is the “Holy, holy, holy” of the angels surrounding the throne in John’s revelation and Isaiah’s vision (Rev. 4:8; cf. Isa. 6:3.) The *Gloria in excelsis* ranks as another hymn of adoration. These two do not exhaust the repertoire of hymnic praise. Christian Hymn writers have created ever new hymns of adoration, such as Charles Wesley’s “Lo! God is here let us adore him.”<sup>67</sup>

Over time, the enactment of this form of worship moved from the congregation to the master musician and priests. Composers gave their very best to the *Sanctus*. These compositions reached their highest complexity and quality in the works of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven whose search for musical unity led them to compose the entire Mass.<sup>68</sup> It was expected that music would be of the quality and splendor appropriate for God’s throne. Though some critics complained that the congregation slept or gossiped, supporters argued that God alone was the audience for worship. Using the analogy of an earthly king whose court was adorned with the most splendid music possible, Mithobius argued that God likewise must be praised with all the resources available. “So one should many thousand

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 52-53.

times more apply all skill, wit, sense, reason, and understanding to the music of the king of kings.”<sup>69</sup> This quest for skill and beauty moved the congregation from the role of participant to that of bystander as the capable and fit created worship worthy of God.

### **Three Distinct Worship Paradigms Grounded in the Psalms**

These three paradigms of worship found in the psalms attributing praise to three images of God, a personal God, a national God, and a creator God, are distinct in their form of address, their content, and their location. These three biblically founded paradigms can be traced in the three traditions noted above. The nuns at St. Michael’s convent worship God in the image of the Deity who has acted throughout God’s salvation history by recounting the stories of God’s mighty acts. The Puritans and Evangelicals worship God in the image of a personal Deity who rescues and saves on a daily basis by testifying to God’s intervention and grace in each individual’s daily lives. Hymnic adoration worships God in the image of the transcendent creator seated in the throne room of heaven by joining the angelic courts with the most capable performers available to create worship worthy of the King of kings. Each of these distinct and contradictory traditions is a faithful manifestation of a paradigm of worship found in the Psalms.

#### Multiple Manifestations of Biblical Models

Looking backward through the various traditions of Christian worship, we add to these three biblical grounded paradigms. The book *Worship: Adoration and Action* was an

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 60.

attempt to consider a biblical theology for the timely focus on worship. As Carson, the editor writes,

This final volume of the series... tries to respond to the current interest in worship. Much of this, we fear, focuses on the mere mechanics of worship; relatively little has sought to establish a biblical or systematic theology of worship, and in that light attempted to critique and revise current practices.

That, at least, was the aim of this volume when it was first envisaged. I am only too aware how far short of the ideal we have fallen. The disagreements of the members of the Study Unit have not been papered over.<sup>70</sup>

The attempt to form one biblical theology for worship failed because they were trying to form one unifying paradigm of biblically faithful worship over and against all of the paradigms expressed in multiple worship traditions. Instead, what the various writers recount are the biblical foundations for each of the traditions they represent. Each grounds their practices in scripture, and yet they are distinctly different and even contradictory in form.

### **Charismatic Worship**

Alistair Brown writes of the biblical foundations for charismatically oriented worship. In contrast to Horton's Reformed re-enactment of the covenant and recitation of the salvation story, Charismatic Christians focus on the now.<sup>71</sup> Citing the promise from Matthew 28:20 that each individual lives constantly with the divine presence, and Mathew 18:20, that God's nearness takes on an extra reality when believers gather together,

Most charismatics do not consider that the church exists either to remember the past or to anticipate the future. Both of these activities happen, but fundamentally the church is called to experience God now.... Whatever the biblical basis, charasmatics would lose almost everything distinctive about them if they had to abandon their consciousness of an active God in the midst of his people.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Carson and World Evangelical Fellowship. Faith and Church Study Unit., *Worship: Adoration and Action*, 11.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 178-88.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

Charismatic churches value variety and the absence of prescribed forms. Considering Psalm 150, Brown notes the various instruments that David makes reference to. Each of these produce varied sounds, some harsher and some softer. The charismatic church expects such variation in worship.<sup>73</sup>

They also expect a sense of God's presence in worship. They expect to experience God's power. "There is more than a little criticism of what some other traditions offer. The unvarying ritual of a fixed liturgy is considered to be mindless repetition and therefore unacceptable to God... Few who have made the change would go back to what they feel were dull and empty forms of worship."<sup>74</sup>

Charasmatics expect to minister to one another in the worship gathering. Looking to Ephesians 4:12-16, they edify one another in word and deed by the laying on of hands and prayer for one another.<sup>75</sup> They expect the Spirit to minister through one another in the midst of worship.

The charismatic Church operates within an existential paradigm that focuses on a sense of the presence of God at all times, but particularly an expectation of the power of the Holy Spirit in worship. This biblically grounded paradigm values variety and freedom. Within this paradigm of worship, other worship traditions are often understood to be mindless, dull, and unacceptable to God.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 179, 87.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 184.

## Anglican Worship

In contrast, Roger Beckwith describes the outstanding characteristic of Anglicanism to be its book of common prayer. He writes,

[D]rawn up in 1549 by the leading Reformer of the Church of England, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer(1489-1556), and revised by him in 1552, was its first vernacular service book but such was the quality of this first attempt that it has never been superseded, and (with some revisions) is still in use today.... Like Luther, and unlike Zwingli or the Anabaptists, he followed the policy of changing what, in the light of Scripture, needed changing, but not of beginning afresh.<sup>76</sup>

Because of the contrast in the two paradigms in which these traditions operate, each seeking to be faithful and grounding themselves in scripture, they have created mutually exclusive forms of worship.

## Presbyterian Worship

Presbyterian worship is marked by the time in which it was being formed. In opposition to the Catholic Church, and in contrast to the Anglican Church, the Scottish Father's desire "was to reform Christian worship according to scripture. They understood this to mean the elimination from public worship all rites and ceremonies without divine warrant."<sup>77</sup> Presbyterian worship is directed by an emphasis on the covenantal relationship of God and God's people. While it no longer receives as much emphasis today, Presbyterians considered the Sabbath part of the moral law, rather than ceremonial because it was found in the Decalogue. The Lord's Day therefore was also celebrated as a Sabbath day of rest.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 110.

### **Multiple Faithful Paradigms**

The writers in this study group take care to explain the way that each of these traditions, Charismatic, Anglican, Presbyterian (and others not noted here) are faithful biblical worship traditions. And yet these traditions conflict with one another. Each approaches scripture with a different lens. There is evident truth in each of these traditions. They are faithfully grounded in scripture, and yet they conflict.

### **Freedom to Be Missional**

In contrast to Michael Horton's presentation of one upright form of biblically faithful worship, there are many. There are multiple forms of worship throughout the Old and New Testaments. There are multiple paradigms of worship within the Psalms, and these continue in Christian tradition. There are many manifestations of biblically founded worship expressed in active worshiping churches today. Our recognition that there are multiple faithful paradigms of worship allows us to be open to the value found in each of them as lenses to faithfulness that one particular paradigm would not be capable of finding.

There is a great deal more freedom than Horton would suggest for approaching scripture through the lens of our particular time and culture. We can seek to be a missional incarnation of the church within this culture and still be faithful to scripture. Having established that freedom, let us explore scriptural warrants for the postmodern values we wish to pursue in worship.

## **5. SCRIPTURAL WARRANTS FOR POSTMODERN VALUES AND EPISTEMOLOGY**

The postmodern worship values of experience, participation, image richness, connectivity, organic structure and holistic approach to scripture are integral human values. It should not be surprising then that these values are expressed in the story of scripture. Specifically, we find these values expressed in the worship setting of the Last Supper.

### **Experience**

The interaction of God and people throughout scripture was often a multi-sensory, transcendent experience of God's presence. The first place God created for interaction with human beings was the Garden, filled with all kinds of trees that were "pleasing to the eye and good for food" (Gen 2:8-9.) The sacrifice of animals was a tactile and olfactory experience of holding a living, breathing and naturally smelling animal. There was movement in laying hands on the animal, or placing it on the altar. As the animal was burned, there was a smell that pleased God (Gen 8:20.) When the people of Israel confirmed their covenant with God, Moses sprinkled the blood of the covenant on them, a tangible, multi-sensory experience of the covenant the Lord had made with them (Ex. 24:8.) In the New Testament, worship was a transcendent experience of the Holy Spirit, as seen in Acts 10:44-46, where the Spirit came upon the circumcised and uncircumcised believers manifested in their speaking in tongues and praising God. Throughout the record of scripture, we see examples of worship as a multi-sensory and transcendent experiences of the presence of God.

### Participation

The interaction of God and people throughout scripture has involved a great deal of participation by the worshiping individual. In the Garden, humans conversed directly with God (Gen. 2:8-9.) In sacrificial worship the individual chose and brought an offering and either offered it directly on an altar to God, or brought it to the priest, laying hands on it to note its substitutionary atonement for their sin (Gen 8:20, Lev. 4:27-29.) When God appeared to Jacob on the way to meet his brother, Jacob wrestled with God (Gen. 32:25.) When the people of Israel confirmed their covenant with God, the young men gathered bulls and sacrificed them. En mass, each individual affirmed their acceptance (Ex. 24:4-8.) In the New Testament, Paul's admonition to the Corinthian church clearly indicates he expects each to contribute to their worship. "What shall I say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church." (I Cor. 14:26.) There is significant warrant in scripture for individual participation in worship.

### Image Rich

The reformers, reacting against medieval practices, refused to consider any visual mediation of the faith. Their reading of the scriptures was colored by that historical situation, but our setting is different. The exclusion of imagery throughout most of the protestant church is influenced by their interpretation of Exodus 26:1 and Deuteronomy 4:15-19. These prohibitions, however, are clearly proscribing idolatry rather than the creation of visual representations of spiritual truths.

Looking to scripture for a guide to the inclusion of visual art, Dyrness examines the seven Hebrew words for used for beauty; tsebi, hadar, pa'ar, hamad, yafah, na'ah, and na'em.

He demonstrates through this study that beauty is interconnected with the concept of being as God wills. The examination of Beauty was part of every day life. The aesthetic, in language and in practice was interconnected to the ethical and economical. It was the natural outworking of things being what God desired them to be. The aesthetic and the holy were intrinsically tied together. Further, creation was not despised as the Greeks despised the material; rather, it was appreciated as the good work of God. God was present in all of creation, and all beauty was due to the world following God's purposes and to God's sustaining presence. "According to the bible then, what is visually lovely and true reflects who God is and, consequently, all that he does."<sup>78</sup>

Throughout the Old Testament, the visual symbol was present with the spoken word in the encounter of God.

A direct line extends from Abraham's experience in Genesis 18, through Moses' encounter on Sinai and the cloud and fire in the wilderness, to the splendor of the temple and the visions of Isaiah and Ezekiel, right through to the transfiguration, the crucifixion, Pentecost, and the Book of Revelations.<sup>79</sup>

The biblical symbols not only united aesthetic and ethical, they reflected a holistic worldview. They demanded a response from the observer that is more than aesthetic.<sup>80</sup>

Though humanity is fallen, it is still made in the image of the creator and it is still able to create worthy art grounded in the narrative of scripture. Such beauty calls us to respond to God with our holistic being and is appropriate for worship.

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<sup>78</sup> William A. Dyrness, *Visual Faith: Art, Theology, and Worship in Dialogue, Engaging Culture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2001), 75.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

### Connective

The earliest example of the church was a highly connective one. The believers devoted themselves to the breaking of bread and to fellowship. They were together and had everything in common. They ate together in each others homes with glad and sincere hearts (Acts 2:42-46). The setting for worship was the home, an intimate family place for meeting. As we will note later, The Last Supper was a highly connective event on which the early church patterned their house church worship.

### Organic Structure

While there were prescribed worship forms in temple worship, this was not the only form of worship found in scripture. Paul's admonition regarding the ordering of worship in 1 Corinthians 14 was not a book of common prayer. In contrast, his directions assume an organic structure in the ordering of the worship time. He asked that not more than three people prophesying speak in one gathering, and that they speak one at a time. The ordering of such a worship gathering would then follow the leading of the spirit. So too in the passage noted above, each member was expected to bring something to contribute to worship. He prescribes decorum rather than a fixed and stable order. The order of any particular time of worship would have varied depending on who was bringing which part, and the Spirit's leading of those who were sharing prophesy. Rather than a pre-set form, these services of worship must have flowed dynamically to suit the elements shared by the participants.

### Postmodern Epistemology and a Holistic Approach to Scripture

Contrary to the Enlightenment's exuberant hope placed in the individual's ability to discern truth through reason, scripture speaks clearly of the limit of human wisdom and

reason. In 1 Corinthians 3:19-20 Paul calls the wisdom of this world foolishness in the sight of God, that God knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile. Later in chapter 12 Paul clearly states that our access to knowledge regarding God and ourselves is limited this side of heaven. “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” Paul makes a clear distinction between God who has access to full knowledge of us and humanity that has dim access to the truths of God.

Where modernity treasured propositional truths that transcended time and culture, scripture is firmly grounded in particular times and cultures. In contrast to the modern attempt to distill scripture into the propositional statements that might be found on the “Roman Road”, scripture is rich with poetry, complexity, mystery, and narrative regarding the interactions between God and humanity. The narratives of the Patriarchs, of Moses and the people of Israel, and of Jesus’ life in the gospels are holistic stories involving plots, motives, emotions, personalities and particular cultures. This is not to say that there are no propositional truths in scripture. Jesus taught in declarative statements. He also taught, however, in metaphor and parable. The gospel as recorded in scripture is more faithfully captured in the emotion, relationship, mystery and drama of narrative than in a five point plan of salvation.

Paul affirms an epistemology of limited human objective access to truth. The breadth of narrative, prayer and poetry affirms the holistic values of truth over and against the Greek dualist elevation of the rational aspects of truth.

## The Last Supper

Like other paschal meals, the Last Supper was a highly *multi-sensory experience*. The atmosphere was bathed in the tradition of a celebration they had each taken part in from their earliest childhood. The smells, tastes, textures, spoken and sung words were both ceremonial echoes of years past and meaningful reminders of their relationship to God.

The Passover is a *participatory* event in its own right. The youngest asks questions, the oldest tells the story. Each participant takes the elements and drinks the cups at prescribed times as they relive the telling of the story. In addition, Jesus invited them to participate in a new way. As John records, he washed each of their feet.

Their celebration was rich *with the imagery* of the paschal elements. Their table was adorned with the bitter herbs, the water for ceremonial washing, the unleavened bread, the wine, a fruit mortar, and the Passover lamb. In addition, Jesus added new symbol and mystery. He took the cup and redefined it in the mystery of the new covenant poured out in his blood. He took the bread and shared it with his friends as his body broken. This was a celebration rich with mystery and imagery.

This worship gathering was a *highly connective* time. It was an intimate time in an upper room among the twelve who had journeyed together for years. Matthew records that Jesus reclined at the table with the twelve (26:20). It was a personal time of interaction between teacher and beloved. It was a time of informal conversation. John notes the conversations between Jesus and Peter at the foot washing and the disciples' questions as Jesus foretold his betrayal. Jesus taught and the disciples asked questions. This gathering was a connective time among a tight-knit group of friends.

The evening had the *organic order* of an informal group of friends sharing together. While there was ceremony, Jesus broke from it and adapted it to his new teachings. He

added to the paschal structure with the foot washing. The flow of events followed the natural course of the drama that was genuinely unfolding as they celebrated and shared together.

Finally, the word of God was not reduced to propositional truths but was engaged *holistically*. The Passover story was presented in its narrative form. The words of Jesus were instructive, but also rich in mystery and symbolism.

The Last Supper was an experiential, participatory, image rich, connective, organically structured worship gathering that approached the word of God holistically.

#### Scriptural Warrants for Postmodern Values

As demonstrated, the values for postmodern worship find their antecedents, and adequate warrant, throughout scripture. Moreover, they are specifically expressed in the Last Supper. There is sufficient scriptural warrant for us to apply these values in our attempt to be an incarnation of worship in postmodernity.

## 6. APPLICATION OF POSTMODERN PRINCIPLES

Having considered the scriptural warrants for the values we seek to manifest in worship, we now turn to the practical outworking of these values. Fundamental to the ethos of our missional community, and therefore our worship, is a missional engagement of postmodern epistemology. Further, in contrast to the modern, rational approach, we need to consider a holistic approach to the understanding and proclamation of scripture. Recognizing the limits of any particular paradigm leads us to consider engaging the multiple paradigms found throughout time and across cultures. Our value of a multi-sensory, image rich and aesthetic experience leads us to consider an engagement of the arts as a means of appealing to postmodern people, of understanding and communicating scripture, and interacting with the popular media that we live and breathe. So too these values lead us to consider the means by which we set apart our worship setting as sacred space. And finally, our values lead us to consider the applications of prayer stations within our worship space and time.

### Engaging a Postmodern Epistemology

Our missional desire to engage our culture leads us to be an incarnational manifestation of the Body of Christ within this culture. More essential to this goal than forms, elements or methods of worship, is the ethos of our community and worship gathering. This ethos is formed in part by our epistemology. This has been a point of significant tension within the Christian community. Some suggest that there is no room for interaction with a postmodern epistemology. Others, like the younger Evangelicals noted by Webber, find themselves already operating in a Christian postmodern epistemology.

## Access to Truth

We can affirm with postmodernity that our access to truth is limited. We are biased by the historical reality of our time and culture. The multiple manifestations of Christian worship each founded on scripture are one example of this bias. More significantly than our context, we are limited by the paradigms (which are informed by our context) in which we understand and organize knowledge. Our paradigms serve us, but they are limited. Further we are not aware of their limitations until we adopt new paradigms and consider the old through them. Our recognition of the limitations of our context and our internal mental framework causes us to state (and hold) our knowledge with some humility. We are not aware of the limitations of our knowledge. For instance, we are not aware of the ways in which we overemphasize one aspect of scripture over another. We are not aware of the ways in which we have unwittingly baptized our culture. We are not aware of the ways in which we shape our perception of knowledge to fit our internal framework rather than modify that framework. For these reasons, we state our knowledge with the expectation that future generations may look back on us through new lenses and ask, how could they not see that they uncritically endorsed, for instance, American consumerism?

The recognition that there are limitations to our own paradigm leads us to present knowledge with humility and to explore the products of other paradigms. This humility is a bridge to our postmodern culture. As Leslie Newbigin states in *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*,

It is essential to the integrity of our witness to... [our Christian faith]... that we recognize that to be its witnesses does not mean to be the possessors of all truth. It means to be placed on the path by which we are led toward the truth. The apophatic

tradition in theology has always insisted on the fact that no human image or concept can grasp the full reality of God.<sup>81</sup>

He says further that we cannot justify our perspective with argument and reason. Rather, a believer “can only say to his unbelieving neighbor, stand here with me and see if you don’t see the same pattern that I do.” Within this epistemology, we do not convince someone of the merit of our belief by argument from authority. Rather, we invite them to come into our community and see our truth lived out and expressed in our actions, in our relationship and in our ministry to the world as the Body of Christ.

### **Essence of Truth**

Postmodernity is amorphous. It is clear that postmodern philosophy endorses the stance that all truth is socially constructed, i.e. that there is no absolute truth, that there is no truth independent of the context of a particular time and place. In this philosophy of the essence of truth, there is no universal truth. There is nothing that is necessarily true across all time and culture.

It is not certain that this belief has been widely adopted within postmodernity. An optimistic view is that postmodernity is skeptical of, rather than entirely dismissive of, absolute truth. In contrast, we within postmodern Christianity continue to affirm at least some universal truth. We unapologetically believe that God is truth and that God and God’s truth exist completely independent of time and space, let alone the cultural contexts of any particular community.

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<sup>81</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, Mich. Geneva [SZ]: W.B. Eerdmans; WCC Publications, 1989), 12.

### **A Missional Application of This Epistemology**

Combining the humility of our recognition of a limited access to truth and our affirmation that God is universal truth, we can approach our culture by inviting people to come and see our truth. As stated before, we can invite a non-believer to come and experience the truth lived out within our community. Once she encounters it, it is our hope she will affirm that it is true for her, and move past her skepticism of universal truth to affirm that this is not just a particular truth, but truth that transcends all time and culture.

#### Holistic Approach to Scripture

Positivist, rational Modernity privileged propositional statements. This led to a tendency in the proclamation of scripture to look within the pericope for such statements. Propositional statements, though are limited. Most of what is involved in the relationships between people can not be captured in propositional statements, or statements that modify a subject with a predicate such as, "God is loving." Poetry is noted for its ability to convey meaning beyond the limit of prose. For this reason, it is a superior medium for conveying love. So too, the narrative conveys truths not captured by such statements. While someone may state that God loves us and pursues us, he can not convey within such statements the truths that are found in the story of the Prodigal son. The story does not just "flesh out" the propositional statement, it conveys the *essence* of what it means that God loves us and pursues us in a way propositional statements can not. No list of attributes can capture or convey the feelings of the son for the father, or the father for the son.

In a more concrete example, how would my wife convey with propositional statements my love for her? She could write an analysis of her perceptions of my feelings, but this could not communicate the truth captured in a simple one sentence narrative- "Bill

loves me like this: Every night that I was on call throughout my residency and fellowship, he came in and saw me and brought me coffee.” Not only are propositional statements not capable of conveying all knowledge, there is significant and important knowledge that they cannot communicate.

In postmodern Christianity there is a renewed appreciation for the poetry, metaphor and narrative of scripture. “[T]he emerging approach to sermons is telling the ‘story of God’ and inviting others into that story instead of outlining propositional principles out of the Bible and turning them into sermon application points.”<sup>82</sup> Sermons are more likely to highlight mystery, ask questions and provoke thought than make propositional statements.

In keeping with the humility born of our limited access to knowledge, “Emerging preachers see themselves as fellow journeyers. Preaching is no longer an authoritative transferring of biblical information.”<sup>83</sup> Moving away from the pedagogical proclamation of scripture, it is common to include others in the explication of scripture through dialogue. Sermons may be broken up with opportunities for the worshipers to engage the passage in images, meditation, journaling, or artistic expression.

### Engaging Multiple Paradigms

It is appropriate within this missional framework to engage other paradigms. If we believe any particular paradigm to be limited, it is appropriate that we consider the products of other paradigms. Emerging churches are doing this by exploring the spiritual practices of Christians from other eras. As Kimball argues,

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<sup>82</sup> Kimball, *Emerging Worship: Creating New Worship Gatherings for Emerging Generations*, 88.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

[A] revival of liturgy and other ancient disciplines, when brought back with life and meaning, are a desired approach to worship in the emerging church. I'm not suggesting we abandon all contemporary forms of worship and music. I'm simply suggesting we don't ignore 2,000 years of church history. There are beautiful expressions of worship from various time periods we can integrate into how we worship today.<sup>84</sup>

In addition to Kimball's exploration of other times, we can benefit in worship from looking to the manifestations of the Church in other cultures. Elements of worship from other cultures can be introduced, but these apart from the personal experience of their community are lacking. A postmodern Christian fellowship would benefit from the opportunity to occasionally visit and experience the worship of other cultures in their midst. Once we share in worship with the Nigerian Presbyterian fellowship that sways and dances to songs led by an electric guitar blaring through an inexpensive amplifier and dances down the aisle singing in thanksgiving as they lay their offering in the plate on the chancel, we may incorporate some of their worship forms with the meaning that they shared them. So too, uniting with other cultures we can share in worship with the African American congregation that hears the word proclaimed in a participatory call-response style, and join the Korean church that gathers at 5:00 in the morning to diligently pray together.

Engaging multiple paradigms is a bridge to our postmodern culture, and it is an opportunity to gain the blessings manifest in Christian communities in other times and cultures.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 92.

### Interaction with the Arts

According to William Dyrness, in *visual faith: art, theology and worship in dialogue*, churches should incorporate art into worship as a means of connecting to our culture.<sup>85</sup>

Church, particularly the protestant church, has had a troubled past with art. But there has been a recent resurgence in the use of art in the church, particularly in worship.

At the same time, the art world whose dominance used to be controlled by a few gate keepers has seen its influence shift to the world of popular art which has become its dominant force. “Art is becoming a cultural event not unlike the rock or film festival. The artist, as a result, becomes a cultural icon, gracing T-shirts and coffee mugs.”<sup>86</sup> The gravity in art has shifted from the high to the popular, while the visual dimension of our culture has gained in power. Dyrness argues that an unprecedented spiritual quest for reconciliation is driving the arts. Gerhard Richter, a contemporary German artist, states that people are turning to art not just as a substitute for religion, but as a religion. He says, “The church is no longer adequate as a means of affording experiences of the transcendental, and of making religion real – and so art has been transformed from a means into the sole provider of religion.”<sup>87</sup> Art has taken the role of transcendental experience, but in and of itself, it does not point to anything. An experience of art outside a context like worship does not have a goal other than its own experience. Thus Art is offering a transcendent experience that does not provide the connection to God that worship provides

Simone Weil argues that there are three ways people are drawn to God, affliction, religious practice and the experience of beauty. The first two have been greatly diminished

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<sup>85</sup> Dyrness, *Visual Faith: Art, Theology, and Worship in Dialogue*.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

in Western culture, leaving the third. She argues, “The beauty of the world is almost the only way by which we can allow God to penetrate us.”<sup>88</sup> Dyrness concludes then that “Art may be a means, indeed the only means of capturing the attention of this generation.... Biblical images demand, when they are placed within their larger biblical context, a response of the whole person not simply to the image but ultimately to God.”<sup>89</sup> Given our desire to include aesthetic, visual, symbol and mystery in our worship, it is entirely appropriate that we should incorporate and engage art in the worship gathering.

### **Art as a lens to understanding**

Beyond art’s benefit to the aesthetics of the worship setting, and its ability to be a vehicle for transcendent experience, Jeremy Begbie illustrates that art can be a significant tool for understanding scripture and our faith beyond the power of rational argument.<sup>90</sup> He gathers together a group of artists to engage our theology of the incarnation through their particular fields. Through them, he demonstrates the way that art provides an opportunity to engage meaning and truth beyond the rational argument. The arts are doorways to mystery that are still grounded in time and space. “One reason why it is so essential that we begin again to do our theology through the arts, is that the arts are never discarnate, they always begin and end in the realm of time and sense, however much they give us glimpses of another realm which transcends it.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Simone Weil, Simone Weil, and Emma Craufurd, *Waiting on God* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1952), 101.

<sup>89</sup> Dyrness, *Visual Faith: Art, Theology, and Worship in Dialogue*, 22, 85.

<sup>90</sup> Jeremy Begbie, *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation through the Arts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000).

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

Literature provides windows of understanding. As an example, King Lear in the storm is power and privilege facing the pain and elements of the common person. Instead of rejecting them, he accepts them as integral to being king:

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,  
 That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,  
 How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,  
 Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you  
 From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en  
 Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp;  
 Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,  
 That thou may shake the superflux to them  
 And show the heavens more just.<sup>92</sup>

This scene conveys part of the meaning of the incarnation of Christ. Christ came and lived in our world with our exposure and pain. In his identification with us, he was able to be a different type of king.

Andrew Rumsey demonstrates the capacity of poetry to elucidate the particularity of the incarnation. He notes the challenge to the church to understand the particularity of Christ. "The Church has often fumbled when appreciating *how* God can be present in the person of Christ. How can the eternal God 'make room' for himself in temporal creation? How can such universalities be confined within particularity?"<sup>93</sup> Poetry, he argues, has the capacity of using the particular to find and convey the universal. In particulars it draws us to attend to particular detail, and then uses these details to suggest in metaphor that which is more than the particular. This poem, 'The Red Wheelbarrow', uses sparse particulars to capture a moment in time:

so much depends  
 upon

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<sup>92</sup> King Lear Act III, scene iv, lines 28-36

<sup>93</sup> Begbie, *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation through the Arts*, 50.

a red wheel  
barrow

glazed with rain  
water

beside the white  
chickens<sup>94</sup>

T.F. Torrance imagines a reporter trying to make sense of the resurrection. He finds his literary forms are insufficient. He needs a new form of literature that can “bear witness to more than it can formally express.”<sup>95</sup> Rumsey responds that “poetry comes uncannily close to realizing this ‘new literary form’.”<sup>96</sup>

In a similar method, Begbie’s collection of artists show that doing incarnational theology through dance can bring back more of ourselves and more of Christ, as a vehicle to understanding the full humanity of the incarnation. They demonstrate that icons safeguard a proper doctrine of the incarnation. They show the power of sculpture to redeem our understanding of the material and that which is other than material. It grants fresh access to the incarnation “in which temporal, physical materials were taken up, renewed and transformed.”<sup>97</sup> They demonstrate through the life and music of Marvin Gaye the authentic struggle of the giving back of Christ’s humanity to the father through the spirit.

Begbie demonstrates the potential role for art in worship as a medium for grasping truth not available to us through propositional statements. As we missionally engage a

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<sup>94</sup> William Carlos Williams and M. L. Rosenthal, *The William Carlos Williams Reader* ([New York: Published for J. Laughlin by New Directions Pub. Corp., 1966), 21.

<sup>95</sup> Thomas Forsyth Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1976), 166.

<sup>96</sup> Begbie, *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation through the Arts*, 62.

culture that looks beyond such statements for truth, it is appropriate that we consider art as a medium for the explication and understanding of scripture and faith in worship.

### **Interacting with Popular Culture**

Because postmodernity focuses on the community as a locus for knowledge verses the universal, it values relevance. One of the windows to being relevant to the world around us is to engage the media of popular culture. Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor argue for such an engagement in *a matrix of meanings: finding God in popular culture*.<sup>98</sup> Borrowing a page from Karl Barth, they argue that we should approach our faith with the bible in one hand and popular culture in the other. If the church's relationship with art has been problematic, the church's relationship with popular culture has been hostile. In contrast, these two seek to find God present and articulated in the various forms of pop culture.

We believe popular music should be heard in the same manner as the psalms, as celebrations of the gift of God-given life. But the top 40 charts also contain songs of longing, regret, anger and doubt. Pop music has helped us hear the Psalms as prayers, formed in frustration, offered to a sometimes hidden God.<sup>99</sup>

They seek to be, and argue the church should be, firmly planted within culture. "We do not sit outside culture, planning how to approach it. Pop culture is our culture. It is the air we breathe, for better or worse."<sup>100</sup>

Lending credence to their argument that God is present within and uses popular culture, Robert K. Johnson cites numerous examples of God moving through the medium of popular film. He tells the story of Catherine Sittser whose mother, grandmother and sister

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>98</sup> Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor, *A Matrix of Meanings: Finding God in Pop Culture, Engaging Culture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2003).

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 11.

were killed in a catastrophic car accident. She found comfort in the Disney movie, *Beauty and the Beast*, because the main character grew up without a mother and yet became an independent, intelligent, beautiful person. He tells a story about the 1964 movie *Becket*. As a result of the faithfulness of Thomas, one of the leading characters, he was martyred on the steps of Canterbury Cathedral. Through this movie, Robert Johnson himself heard his call to seminary. I can attest as well to others who heard their call to ministry through popular film. James Harper, a pastor in Houston, heard his call to ministry while watching *The Color Purple*. Tyler Watson, a student at Fuller Theological Seminary, heard God calling him to seminary through the movie *The Prince of Egypt*.

In the midst of our striving to give people an opportunity to express their worship for God in a multi-sensory experience, we can ground our worship in the relevance of the world around us by incorporating and engaging media from popular culture.

#### Arts Team

Sally Morgenthaler in our course lectures recommended that our churches create worship planning teams that include artists of various media.<sup>101</sup> As noted by Dyrness, many creative, artistic people are not found within the church, for the church has found no place for them.<sup>102</sup> Sally therefore recommends that those artistically inclined folks within the congregation reach out to those who are not part of a church and invite them in to take part. The purpose of this team of artists would not just be to decorate the worship space, though that may be a task they take on. Sally recommends that this group be part of the planning for

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>101</sup> Sally Morgenthaler, Class lectures of PM723 Worship in an Emerging Culture, Fuller Theological Seminary, March 1-March 12, 2004.

the whole gathering. She notes the aesthetic and emotive viewpoint they may bring that would otherwise be missing. Gathering these together with other worship leaders, she recommends a team approach to designing worship. Starting with a theme or with scripture, the team can ask questions, build off of one another and frame the worship gathering from the ground up with all of its elements.

Planning a service of this complexity, she recognizes, is a significant undertaking and she therefore recommends that at least initially, these be occasional services. Dan Kimball also recommends that as ministries begin these multi-sensory worship gatherings be less than weekly. He suggests that they be monthly large group gatherings, and that the church regularly meet in simpler worship gatherings weekly in house church groups.<sup>103</sup>

### Sacred Space

When Brett Woods, a twenty nine year old with a PhD in Biology, was asked in 2000 what he thought of the Cathedral Notre Dame which he had just visited, he answered in a sense of wonder, “This is the kind of place that God would live in.” He did not mean by this that God did not live elsewhere or everywhere. He was describing a transcendent experience of the sacred space of Notre Dame. Postmoderns value experience. Expressing this value in worship, we desire to create a space that is set apart for the opportunity to experience the transcendent presence of God. We desire for it to be a very visual experience that creates a sense of awe and mystery.<sup>104</sup> Emerging worship leaders have been accomplishing this in part

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<sup>102</sup> Dyrness, *Visual Faith: Art, Theology, and Worship in Dialogue*, 12.

<sup>103</sup> Kimball, *Emerging Worship: Creating New Worship Gatherings for Emerging Generations*, 101.

<sup>104</sup> Jonny Baker, Doug Gay, and Jenny Brown, *Alternative Worship: Resources from and for the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 78.

by borrowing from the past. It is common for worship space to be decorated with many candles. Some have placed them in shapes like a cross, others all around the room. Many use incense to set apart the worshiping space. Kimball notes the use of different lighting throughout the rooms, and cloth such as velvet. He notes that in most settings the lighting is dim.

Kimball also notes the common use of art that is expressive of the community, and art at stations for reflection and artistic expression. Scripture is often visually displayed throughout the worship setting in art, in written form, or projection. Visual images of stain glass windows might be shown on screens. The spaces communicate that creativity is a vital part of their worshiping community.

The formality and informality of this space can be used in different ways. On the one hand, a Gothic cathedral setting, such as Notre Dame, offers a particularly powerful setting for an experience of awe and mystery. On the other hand, it offers much less to the intimacy of a group experience. Kimball recommends a living room like setting, even for a gathering of 500, to avoid the spectator-theater feel. He notes that Solomon's Porch has set up their worship space with couches and chairs for several hundred people.<sup>105</sup>

### Prayer Stations

Perhaps one of the more unique manifestations of worship within postmodern Christianity is the development of stations for various activities within the worship gathering space and time. These stations are a manifestation of several values. They offer an increased participation by the individual. They offer an opportunity to engage scripture in a non-

pedagogical fashion. They provide for a multi-sensory encounter with God. They provide for variety and an organic progression to the worship experience. An individual, either throughout the service or during a particular part set aside in the service, can go to various places throughout the worship space. These stations can be opportunities for expression, such as journaling, or artistic creativity. They can be places for meditating on or contemplating particular passages of scripture, either written or presented in a work of art. There can be stations for various forms of prayer, lighting candles in prayer, taking different postures in prayer. I have seen stations with tangible physical props to hold when you pray, or pictures of the subjects of intercessory prayer. These various stations are tools for encountering God that express postmodern worship values.

#### Application of Postmodern Principles

Applying our postmodern worship values leads us to develop a missional epistemology, consider a holistic approach to scripture, engage other paradigms and the arts, consider our worship space and prayer stations. Having worked out the implications of these values, we turn to apply them first in a limited form in my congregation, and then more fully in the worship setting of a missional outgrowth of a church in California that is intentionally seeking to be an incarnation of the body of Christ in postmodernity.

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<sup>105</sup> Kimball, *Emerging Worship: Creating New Worship Gatherings for Emerging Generations*, 80.

## 7. APPLICATION TO CURRENT SETTING

While postmodernity has had far reaching effects throughout the United States, the effect is more blunted in Dallas, Texas. Southern culture as a whole has a stronger history of connection to the church than elsewhere in the country. Dallas, while a large metropolitan area, is still called the buckle of the Bible belt by those who live here. Conservative evangelical Christianity has a very strong presence here.

The Christian presence is even more pronounced within the African-American community. My ministry setting, Glendale Presbyterian Church, is located in a predominantly black neighborhood. An internet search will reveal that there are seventy-two churches within a one mile radius of our congregation. Most of these churches are small churches in buildings smaller than a house, or in converted houses in the residential neighborhoods. There are many churches because there are many people here connected to churches. Our church had a school supply give away in August of 2004. Of 134 families that came, 103 reported that they had a church home.

Christianity remains ingrained in the consciousness of black culture. It is not at all uncommon for someone to respond to the question, 'How are you?' with, "I'm blessed," even when talking with a total stranger. I see this in all of the locally owned restaurants. When I first walked into Catfish Floyd's, I noted the large sign in the window that says "We Believe in Jesus." When I went to BB's Bakery and Diner, BB admitted to me that she had not attended church in a few years, but she gave me a pastor's discount. She evidently respected and valued the role of the pastor, even as a non-attender. Every time I sit down at

the table at Sweet Georgia Brown's, I see and hear black gospel worship videos playing from monitors throughout the restaurant. When I stood in line at Williams Chicken, I noted a framed flyer next to the counter explaining their partnership with one of the local churches as they give away chicken at special events throughout the community. While the church has moved to the fringes of larger American culture, the church is still very much a dominant force within this southern black community.

Still, the culture within the black community looks different than it did in 1954. Some of the educators in my congregation have noted to me the shift in the relationships between parents and schools. It used to be, they say, that there was a strong partnership between the parents and the teachers. In contrast, parents have become apathetic if not adversarial. They see the effects of drugs within the family. When one member of our church asked a student she was counseling where her mother was, the student responded that she was probably on the corner of such and such street about a block away from the school, high on crack. The student said that was where he saw his mother everyday when he left school with his friends.

Particularly among the youth, there has been a significant deterioration in respect for authority. Genetta Richardson, our church secretary, shares the story of playing with her friends in shorts as a child in the 50s. When the pastor came walking down the street, they ran from him because they did not want him to see them dressed in shorts. They had a reverent respect for pastors, and other leaders. Paul Johnson Jr. shared that when he was a child in the 60s and 70s, if an adult stranger in the community admonished him to change his behavior, he listened, because he knew that if he did not, some how it was going to get back to his parents and there would be consequences. In contrast, he shared his challenge in

working with a local basketball team. The students from families that he knew were very respectful and obedient, but his position as an adult and coach did not demand the respect of the rest of the students.

So too, while the church has remained at the center of the consciousness of the black community, at the same time, and in a peculiar way side by side with the church, there is a very secular non-God fearing popular culture. Perhaps this is best illustrated in work of popular black recording artists who give thanks to God publicly when they receive awards, and may have a song on every album dedicated to God, but the other eleven songs celebrate lustful indiscriminant sex, prideful violence, and a life of partying and drugs. Snoop Dogg, for example describes his witness and faith thusly: “**Chuuch:** To me, that means to have God in everything you do. For example, ‘I’m trying to holla at these dizzles fo’ shizzle, chuuch.’”<sup>106</sup> Meanwhile, a biographer notes the sexism and violence in his music and the witness of his life.

Introduced to the world through Dr. Dre's *The Chronic*, Snoop quickly became the most famous star in rap, partially because of his drawled, laconic rhyming and partially because the violence that his lyrics implied seemed real, especially after he was arrested on charges of being a murder accomplice.... [H]is lyrics... were accused of being exceedingly violent and sexist.<sup>107</sup>

While Snoop Dogg poorly illustrates the dominant role the church plays in the black community of Dallas, he does embody the contradictions between the continuing consciousness of the Christian faith and the simultaneous manifestation of a very secular culture.

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<sup>106</sup> MTV.com, [http://www.mtv.com/bands/s/snoop\\_dogg/news\\_feature\\_061303/](http://www.mtv.com/bands/s/snoop_dogg/news_feature_061303/)

<sup>107</sup> MP3.com snoop dogs biography, <http://www.mp3.com/snoop-dogg/artists/32973/biography.html>

If these are the effects of postmodernity they are peculiar. It is still acceptable (and expected) for churches in the black community to make dogmatic authoritative proclamations. On the other hand, there is a lack of integration between the respect paid to the Church and the patently non-Christian values of the entertainment media. Though the church is still honored, it may not be relevant. Framing this in epistemological terms, though it is acceptable and expected for the church to make authoritative statements as though we have certain access to truth, these truths are not being integrated into cultural practice. It is possible that the larger black culture, even in Dallas Texas takes these proclamations with a grain of salt. They respect them, but do not act on them. The message of the church may appear irrelevant to their daily lives. There may be an underlying alignment of black culture with postmodernity that there are many paradigms for truth and that we can not proclaim to the non-Christian in the authority of dogmatic statements.

The questions posed require information that I do not have. While I have lived and worked within this setting or a year and a half, I am still a sojourner learning from this culture. If a definitive or even probable explanation is to be found, it will have to be from people in our congregation who are more established within this community.

It is clear that my ministry setting is markedly different from much of postmodernity. This setting has changed in the last fifty years commensurate with the rise of postmodernity. It is not obvious, though, that these changes are a product of postmodernity, nor, if they are, to what extent, and in what fashion. For this reason the application of the principles presented in this paper is tentative and limited.

## Glendale Presbyterian Church

Glendale Presbyterian Church is a multigenerational congregation with 122 active adult members, forty-two baptized children, and ninety attending weekly worship. It is the product of three churches folded into one. In 1968, two black churches and one white church closed their doors to create Glendale Presbyterian Church. This was a time of significant upheaval in the neighborhood surrounding the church. Following court rulings regarding desegregation, black families began moving into Oak Cliff. The three congregations came together out of a sense of self preservation. The white congregation was occupying the property which we now use. In the few years during and after the merger of these three churches, whole blocks of white home owners put their houses up for sale. Parishioners tell me you could look down a street and see that every house on the block had a for sale sign. Within a few years, nearly all the members of the previous white congregation had moved away and found other churches. Some 37 years later, our congregation remains 16% white. Many of those have been members since the birth of the church.

This congregation is unique from other black denominational churches in its worship style. It is more traditionally Presbyterian in format, and has a number of higher church elements. The atmosphere, though, is somewhat different from white Presbyterian congregations. While there is not the level of participation found in a call-response style of worship, it is common to hear affirmations of “amen” from the congregation during the reading of scripture, the sermon, and the sharing of joys. Though the format is formal, the atmosphere is less reserved.

### Experiential

Though our worship uses higher church elements, the atmosphere does not provide the experience of reverence, awe and wonder that the service at Notre Dame provides. In fact, most of our service provides the intellectually weighted experience that would be found in most white, traditional, mainline denominational services. The exception to this is when our gospel choir leads in worship once a month. When our gospel choir sings, the experience is much more holistic. People clap, sway, smile, and yell 'amen'. It is a more holistically engaging experience. Compared to most black churches, excepting our gospel choir, our service is a much more rational experience.

### Participation

The worship service has a number of participatory elements. We have a responsive call to worship, the congregation stands for the first hymn, and prays prayer of confession in unison. The congregation responds with the Gloria Patri. We have a responsive reading of a psalm then a hymn with people seated. The congregation stands for the reading of the Gospel and respond, "Thanks be to God." The congregation responds to the sermon with the Apostles' Creed. Next there is a time for sharing of joys and concerns. This is a very active time. People celebrate their birthdays, the scholastic achievements of their kids, their anniversaries, and their work promotions. People share their concerns, and also various aspects of the ministry of the church. More than a dry list of announcements, in this time we engage the missional life of the church within the worship service. The congregation responds to the pastoral prayer with a choral prayer response. The offering plates are past amongst the people, and we stand for a prayer of dedication and the closing hymn. We respond to the benediction by singing "The Lord Bless You and Keep You."

There are two things to note here. First, while the elements of the worship service are formal, there is a lot of participation by the congregation. Secondly, most of the participation is the congregation acting as a whole rather than an individual expression. The exception to this would be the times of sharing of joys and concerns. There is a notably freer atmosphere during this time, and that may be because of the freedom of individual expression. Compared to many white Presbyterian worship services, this service is notably more participatory. Compared to most black worship services, our worship is rather reserved.

### Image-Rich and the Arts

While we have banners made by a member of the congregation that are changed with each season, we do not have much interaction with art in the service. Our sanctuary is pretty, but it is not rich with images. We have a praise dance team, but they perform mainly for programs and rarely participate in the service. This is an area of worship that has not much been explored.

### Connective

The joys and concerns time already mentioned is a connective time. The rest of the service is not so connective. There is an expectation that people will come into the sanctuary in quiet. Though the time set apart for worship is not connective, the balance of our gathered time is highly connective. When you step out of worship, ladies in the kitchen have food ready every week. People grab a plate and share together for a few minutes, then take their food to Sunday school. There are Sunday school classes for all ages of children and three adult Sunday school classes. These classes have been meeting for years. One of the classes is made up of folks in their 30s and 40s; another by folks their parents' ages. People have

been sharing together in these classes for decades. There is a great deal of discussion in these classes about the application of the text to their daily lives. Though our worship is not a very connective time, our Sunday morning gatherings as a whole are very connective.

### Organic Structure

Our worship service follows a very uniform preset form. Not only does it follow a prescribed order, but there is little variation within the elements. Other black worship services often follow a schedule, but any particular element is dynamic in length. The leader may ad lib, or call for responses. The leader may spend a great deal more time with one piece or another as they are led by the spirit. Not only is the framework of our service strikingly less organic than other churches, its implementation is also more rigid. It may be important to note that people within this congregation recognize and appreciate this difference. Part of the draw of our service has been that it contrasts to other black services that can last for hours. One member regularly speaks to the merits of our sermons following the scripture passage, which may be in contrast to other black worship service where the pastor takes a great deal of liberty to dynamically go where the Spirit may lead.

It is also notable that this rigid structure is not consistent with the rest of the life of the church. Church programs are often loosely structured. Most committee meetings are fairly dynamic in their flow. The committee structures themselves are much less rigid than other churches. In fact, despite the formal government structure, most of the ministry of the church happens dynamically. Particular individuals take on responsibilities that fit their passions outside of the committee structure. So at the same time parishioners recognize the non-organic worship structure as an attractive aspect of their identity, it is incongruent with the ethos of the congregation outside of worship.

### Areas for Growth

As noted earlier, I am hesitant to predict what would be appropriate changes for this congregation's worship service. From the principles stated earlier, I can make tentative suggestions as to directions our worship could take. It will have to be the congregation, though, that discerns more accurately what changes would connect to our community. Therefore, I note steps we have planned to begin to take us in that direction.

Given my limited knowledge of the culture, the congregation must be the locus for the development of missionally appropriate ideas. Toward that end, we have this year begun a process of engaging the congregation in a missional church conversation. We are going to have two after worship events. In the first event, we are going to invite the congregation to chart the history of the church and the changes within society over the last fifty years. This will give us an opportunity to celebrate the history and roots of the congregation, and at the same time consider the changing setting in which our congregation exists. In the second congregational event, we will watch a fifteen minute video of five Mennonite churches who have been carrying out changes in their ministry so as to engage the world in their midst. From this spring board, we hope to have discussions inviting the members to consider how God might be calling us to engage the neighborhood around us. Our hope from this is twofold. First, we desire for the congregation to engage in the missional church conversation. Second, we hope to identify a few people who find passion in this conversation who can continue to explore the meaning and direction this ministry may lead us.

Turning this team toward the issue of worship, it is my desire that we would be able to develop missionally appropriate ideas for our congregation. There are a few preliminary suggestions that I would make.

### Preliminary Suggestions for Change

While it is difficult to discern the effects postmodernity has had on the black culture, it is not as difficult to discern how well our service manifests the values of black culture. In respect to music, our service is out of step with our culture. Corbitt argues that music is culturally defined.<sup>108</sup> It is bound to context. Not only is musical style defined, but the boundaries of what is and is not music is defined by culture. Music is the heart language of the people. While we may learn music of other cultures, and the music of our native culture may change, we express genuine worship in the language of our heart. Incorporating the heart language of the black community into our service wakes up our congregation. It engages us in a holistic fashion that is lacking without it.

I met with Calvin Paige, African American pastor of Crest Moore King United Methodist Church, and African American Ministries consultant for the North Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church.<sup>109</sup> Looking at our service, he encouraged us to incorporate more gospel praise music. As noted earlier, the gospel choir is a highlight of our worship gatherings. The congregation comes alive. There is a different atmosphere and a powerfully different experience of worship when they lead. Calvin recommends that we recruit a few of the people from the choir to lead weekly praise choruses. In addition, I recommend that our gospel choir take a more central role in worship, leading us twice a month rather than once a month.

Drawing from the emerging church model, I would recommend a greater engagement with the arts. We have a few artistically minded people in our congregation, like the member

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<sup>108</sup> J. Nathan Corbitt, *The Sound of the Harvest: Music's Mission in Church and Culture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1998), 35.

<sup>109</sup> Calvin Paige, Interview in Dallas Texas, February 8, 2005

who has made our banners. I believe it would be in our interest to invite them to come together to take a more active part in worship. Drawing on Sally Morgenthaler's suggestions, I recommend that we start with one service event, such as our Easter service. Coming together and drawing themes from worship we could incorporate our visual artists as well as our praise dancers into an artistically engaged service.

Finally, I have begun preaching in a more narrative style. Recovering the meaning in the message that was lost in our modern redaction of scripture, I am seeking to tell the stories of scripture. In this, I am retelling the narratives of the gospels. I am writing and using first person monologues to convey the story, and I am incorporating stories from my own life and the life of our congregation.

#### Application to Current Setting

Postmodernity, while far reaching, has had a limited effect on the south, and an even more limited effect on the black community here in Dallas, Texas. Still, our culture has changed, and it behooves us to consider manifesting the body of Christ more faithfully in our mission field. To that end, we are holding congregational gatherings to begin a missional church conversation. From these discussions, we hope for concrete suggestions for change. Until these occur, my preliminary suggestions for our congregation are that we include more gospel music in our worship services by adding a second Sunday a month of leading by our Glendale Voices of Praise choir, and adding gospel praise choruses to our weekly service. In addition, I recommend that we incorporate more art into our service by developing an artist team to plan for an event such as Easter. Finally, I have begun preaching in a more narrative form. It is my desire that through these steps, we will have a more missional incarnation of worship in our mission field.

## **8. APPLICATION IN AN EMERGING CONGREGATION**

Our study of worship within postmodernity has limited application in my current worship setting. For that reason, I am applying this study to a congregation in Fresno, California. The Presbyterian Church throughout the Central Valley of California has seen a significant drop in youth participation. While some churches may be connecting better than others, on the whole, the church is not connecting to the younger generation. Fresno, though somewhat more conservative than much of California, is very much affected by postmodernity. University Presbyterian Church has begun an alternative worship service called ‘Resonance’ designed to be a manifestation of Christian worship in postmodernity. While I am aware of what they have done in the past, I am not familiar with what they are presently doing. Therefore, without assessing the ministry that is presently taking place, the following are applications of the concepts of this paper for a setting such as Resonance.

### Epistemology, Values, and Ethos

The ethos of the community and therefore the worship service is crucial to the effectiveness of this missional endeavor. Worshipping in a postmodern style is not of any value if the ethos of the community does not reflect the epistemology and worship values that we have expressed earlier. It would benefit any new ministry of this kind to spend months considering its values. I recommend regular informal gatherings in homes where the community could engage scripture, tell their own stories and discuss our access to knowledge, the limits of paradigms, organic structure, and experience, participation, image

richness and connectivity. As the community considers and embraces these concepts, the fundamental values of a postmodern ethos can be formed.

### Worship Team

The worship team is in no small part dependent upon the gifts available to the community. Assuming that there is some talent present in the community, I recommend worship be planned by a team of people. This team would include the musicians, artists, audio-video techs and teachers. The role of this team is to develop and lead the large group service together. Starting together, this team can consider the scripture and theme for the gathering and build ideas for each aspect of the gathering. Folks can go from this meeting to build their particular parts – the music, or the video – but the genesis of the service, including the proclamation of scripture, is integrated in design. For the smaller size that I believe the Resonance congregation to be, I recommend informal services in peoples' homes on a weekly basis, and larger more multi-sensory gatherings on a monthly basis.

### Monthly Multi-sensory Worship gathering

#### **Sharing a Meal**

I highly recommend that the monthly worship gatherings begin or end with a meal. Not only does this follow the pattern of the Last Supper, and the house churches mentioned in the New Testament, this is perhaps one of the most universally effective methods available to us for connecting to one another. The logistics of this are challenging. If the meal is before the gathering, there is clean up needed after the meal. The community could clean up together and then share in the rest of worship. The meal could be after, but then there is

preparation needed before the meal. This could exclude people from the service. Though there are logistical challenges, it can and should be done.

### **Sacred space**

The space for the multi-sensory worship service should both be intimate and set apart for worship. A traditional sanctuary with fixed bench seating is far from ideal for this. Try holding any meeting in such a sanctuary that requires people to talk to one another and the limitations will be clear. Instead, I recommend the seating allow interaction and promote a family atmosphere. It is best that the space have dynamic lighting. Candles, textured cloth, and various art forms have limited aesthetic worth under the glare of fluorescent lighting. The space should have art developed by members of the community. This could be expressions of a particular season, or works that represent the enduring values of the community.

### **Organic Format**

The order of the service should follow the function of the scripture, the theme and the elements that people have developed for the service. The leadership team should be encouraged to invite the participation of the community members in providing the elements for the service. As many people as possible should have the opportunity to contribute to the service as God has gifted them and as is fitting for the service. There should be visible parity in the leadership group as this demonstrates the equal participation of all of the members of the community.

### **Imagery and Video**

It is our desire that the artists in the community could contribute to the atmosphere of worship. An artistic work fitting the design of the service will provide the opportunity for

people to engage the meaning and mystery of scripture. In addition, I recommend the team consider works that engage our awareness of the world around us, such as the video of the Lords prayer being read with active street scenes in the background. The visual realm can be used to create an atmosphere, to engage scripture, and to connect to our culture.

### **Music**

Music has sometimes been understood to be the primary place for spiritual encounter in a worship experience. While music should be an opportunity for encounter, it should be one of many opportunities for encounter. If we are seeking to provide a multi-sensory opportunity for expressing our worship to God, care should be taken to keep the musical worship from eclipsing the other elements of the gathering.

### **Scripture**

There are many ways for the community to engage scripture. While scripture should be central to the worship gathering, the preaching time does not necessarily have to be central. Scripture can be enacted. It can scroll on a screen with the congregation standing in silence before it. People can stand and share their responses to the passage. The passage can be enacted in drama. The community can discuss the passage. The point is, though scripture should be central to the service, the community has the freedom of approaching the proclamation of the scripture in different ways.

The worship ethos we are creating encourages the person who is preaching to do so from a fellow sojourner perspective, rather than an authoritative pedagogical perspective. Scripture should be engaged holistically, taking care to find the relational and emotional, the mystery and awe. This is not to exclude the propositional statements upon which our

evangelical tradition was built, but to embrace the elements not cherished or examined within modernity.

### **Stations**

Prayer stations are a tool available to the team as they design a worship gathering. Stations can be easily adapted to contribute to the larger design of the service. They do not have to be static. Rather, the themes, focuses and worship forms can be chosen for each design. As is fitting each design, they can provide opportunities for meditation, journaling, artistic expression, intercessory prayer for pictured subjects, lighting candles in prayer, or taking different postures in prayer. The stations are tools of great diversity that allow the congregation new avenues for participation.

### **Engaging other Paradigms**

Because we recognize that there are multiple faithful paradigms of worship within scripture and across our times and cultures, and because we recognize the limits of our own paradigms, it behooves us to draw from others. As the team seeks to develop a breadth of worship experiences, they can draw from the ancient disciplines of the church, from the mystic writers, and from various other sources throughout our Christian history. In addition, we gain from the inclusion of multiple cultures. I recommend that the community encourage its members to build relationships with Christian churches of other races and cultures within Fresno. Individuals can visit other worshipping communities, or the community can attend another service en mass. As we make personal connections such as these, we have the opportunity to incorporate their practices into our service and reflect on the faith manifest through their paradigm.

### Application in an Emerging Congregation

The values and principles of postmodern worship apply to a congregation that is seeking to be a missional incarnation of Christian worship within postmodernity, such as this “Resonance” community in Fresno, California. Applying these principles, it is essential that the community consider the values that form a postmodern ethos. The worship team should include people from a range of skills coming together to design a holistic monthly worship experience. Including a meal in the gathering contributes toward connectivity. The worship space should allow informal interaction and be set apart with art and lighting. Format should be organic and free, mixing video, music, scripture and stations for participation. The community should engage other paradigms throughout history and across cultures. As we incorporate these values we are, to the limit of our present knowledge, creating a missional incarnation of Christian worship in postmodernity.

## CONCLUSION

Our culture has changed dramatically in the last 50 years. Underlying these particular changes is a paradigm shift. We have entered into postmodernity. The church can not be separate from culture. Rather than be an enclave of 1955, the church should seek to be a missional incarnation of the body of Christ in our contemporary setting. Seeking to engage this setting, we look to the younger generation of Christians who grew up in this new culture. Postmodernity is a moving target. Still, to the best that we can discern to date, these younger leaders share a set of common values. They operate in a missional postmodern epistemology that embraces the limits of our access to truth while continuing to affirm the existence of God as an independent truth unchanged by time or culture. They see the world in an organic paradigm, and seek organic structure. They value experience, participation, image-richness, and connectivity. They recognize the limits of any one paradigm, and seek to learn from those who have come before us and those of other cultures.

There are multiple paradigms of worship in scripture as well. We see many evolving forms of worship, and even different paradigms around the image of God as a personal God, a national God and a creator God. Recognizing that there is not one biblically faithful model of worship but many manifested across time and culture gives us the freedom to explore a postmodern incarnation of worship. There are warrants throughout scripture for our postmodern worship values. We see them each specifically expressed in the Last Supper.

Applying these values, we see the need for a holistic approach to scripture. We see the benefit of an engagement of the arts. The arts contribute to an aesthetic worship space.

They can be a lens for our understanding of faith and scripture. They are an opportunity to engage popular culture. We see the benefit of creating a sacred space that offers an opportunity for transcendence, and the benefit of prayer stations for providing increased participation and modes of expression.

As the reach of postmodernity is limited within the black community in Dallas, there is limited application of these principles to my current setting. We see within this setting, though, facets that we can affirm. In particular we can note that the black community has always valued some of the concepts that postmodernity values. There has always been a more holistic engagement in worship, with more participation from the members. Our congregation has not embraced these as much as we might, and therefore we may be able to better connect by increasing the use of gospel music. We could incorporate more art into our service, and I am seeking to do more narrative preaching.

The full application of these principles of postmodern worship fits better in the “Resonance” community in Fresno, California. In this setting we are able to consider the importance of developing a postmodern ethos, and a multi-gifted worship team. These principles lead us to incorporate a meal into monthly large group gatherings, design an informal, connective worship space, and have an organic format with scripture, image, music and prayer stations, engaging other eras and cultures.

Our knowledge is imperfect. Postmodernity is young and dynamic. We look to culture forecasters, and to Christians who have grown up in postmodernity. With the best knowledge that we are able to gain from these we seek to reach out to the world around us in mission. Within the limit of that knowledge, this is a missional incarnation of Christian worship in Postmodernity.

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