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EDITOR'S NOTE: EVANGELISM AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Evangelism and spiritual formation are kindred fields of practice and study. Both are deeply interested in the way humans define their lives. Both are concerned with the psychological and spiritual realities that influence humans. Both proclaim that the transformation of a human being is not only possible, but is to be expected, and both seek to help humans undergo that transformation.

Over the past half century, both also have sought to find unique places in the academy as fields of study in their own rights. Both have succeeded in some measure, creating guilds, certifications, endowed chairs at institutions of higher education, and tracks of study in degree programs. For example, today it is commonplace for someone to seek a Doctor of Ministry in Spiritual Formation or Evangelism, something that would have been impossible only a few decades ago.

These easy points of contact have not always been so clear. This has largely been due to the stereotypes of each practice. For decades, at least in North America, evangelism was viewed through the lens of the Second Great Awakening. The evangelist was one who called together large groups of people in order to challenge their views of the world with propositional statements about Christ in order to precipitate crisis conversions. Spiritual directors, on the other hand, toiled much more quietly, using spiritual practices to guide others toward experiencing God through engagement with ritual, symbolism, and imagery. The former publicly proclaimed the work of Christ and

called people to repent. The latter met privately with those seeking a deeper experience of God.

While these stereotypes persist in many quarters, they have begun to crumble. Partially precipitated by the work of scholars and partially by the desperation of declining denominations who are seeking creative means of engaging with postmodern culture, the linkages of evangelism and spiritual formation have become a point of serious enquiry. The increasing focus on all things missional has also helped in this. Under the missional theology being developed, the study and practice of evangelism allows a greater recognition of the missional identity of the Christian, while the study and practice of spiritual formation puts forward the practices that help sustain that identity. Moreover, the practices themselves are missional, offering ways for people to experience and explore the presence of God.

It is with this growing confluence of the two fields in mind that the Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education chose to focus its 2011 annual meeting on the theme of evangelism and spiritual formation. The plenary sessions focused on the fact that several evangelism scholars are now using spiritual formation as a hermeneutic for exploring evangelism theologically, as well as for how evangelists might more effectively reach people in North America in the early part of the 21st century. These included Richard Peace from Fuller sharing his view of evangelism as hospitality to explore spiritual things, and Elaine Heath from Southern Methodist University describing how her view of evangelism, grounded in the mystical

tradition of the Christian faith, has led to the development of the New Day communities

This issue of the journal continues with the same theme, offering a series of articles that explore how evangelism has been shaped by a growing awareness of the need for exploring spirituality. In the first article, based on his presentation at the annual meeting, Bob Whitesel argues that there are specific spiritual “waypoints” which all people must pass if they are to come to a mature life in Christ. A careful knowledge of these waypoints can better equip congregations to evangelize people regardless of where they are on the way to Christian maturity. George Hunsberger commends us to recall that Jesus presented the gospel in a way that also proclaimed the fullness of God’s justice coming upon the earth. In remembering this, Hunsberger suggests that those who seek to evangelize and those who seek social justice must do so in concert, recognizing that one Jesus does not prefer one to the other. Christopher James offers an article on what he terms “missional acuity,” suggesting that evangelists and missionaries are in need of developing the spiritual discipline of seeing through new eyes those to whom they would offer the gospel. Recognizing that evangelism and spiritual formation are of no value unless they are practiced, Dwight Judy and Whitney Starkey tackle the issue of how to communicate and embody the hope of the gospel in the face of doomsday predictions. To do this, they present two sermons. Playful and not scholarly, the sermons point to how evangelists can be a calming and wise influence through prayer and focusing on the abundant love of God in a world full of fear. Doug Powe gives a

careful overview of the ways that the African American church is struggling to find its identity fifty years after the Civil Rights movement. He challenges the African American church to ground its notions of sanctuary, blessing, and spiritual worth in the *missio Dei* rather than in a false sense of accomplishment defined by socio-economic achievements. Finally, Rick Richardson lays out a helpful guide to makes sense of the increasingly complex manifestations of the church that are coming into existence. In doing this, he considers how these new expressions of the church both can learn from and can challenge traditional evangelical theological emphases.

It has taken far too long to move beyond the popular stereotypes of evangelism and spiritual formation. Now that we have, numerous points of overlap between the two fields are becoming clear. The changing culture in North America demands even further exploration on this front as we seek new vistas from which to view and share the Good News of Jesus Christ.

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May 2012

MISSIO WAYPOINTS: INTEGRATING THE ENGEL AND CLINTON SCALES TO FOSTER HOLISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

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Abstract: The Engel Scale of Spiritual Decision and the Clinton Stages of Discipleship are widely cited as explanatory models of spiritual discovery and formation. However, each focuses toward either a pre-conversion or post-conversion description of the process. Toward creating a more holistic and uninterrupted process model of spiritual decision, this article looks at the strength of each classical model and integrates them into a more holistic “waypoint model” while removing some overlap. The thesis of this article is that by combining and editing the Engel and Clinton process models, a more complete and helpful model emerges.

People of the Way

One of the most prevalent metaphors for spiritual development is that of a journey. As Esther de Waal, author and Catholic theologian, famously intoned, “Life seen as a journey, an ascent, a pilgrimage, a road, is an idea as old as man himself.”

Christians have particularly recognized the importance of this metaphor. One of the earliest titles for Christians at the time of the Acts was “the people of the way.”¹ Not only have Christians recognized that they are on a journey, they have sought to better understand the journey. Theologian Lesslie Newbigin emphasized this

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when he stated, “as a human race we are on a journey and we need to know the road.”² This article is focused on better knowing that road.

For a starting point we will examine two contemporary and frequently cited descriptions of this spiritual journey and gauge their holism, durability and applicability. My thesis is that these two process models have strengths and weakness, primarily because each focuses on either the pre-conversion or post-conversion journey. To address this lack of holism, I will suggest a new synthesis of these models which can yield a more comprehensive explanation of the spiritual journey.³

Engel’s Process Model: “The Great Commission in Common Dress”⁴

James Engel, a professor at Eastern University and founder of its Center for Organizational Excellence, researches organizational behavior and communication. Engel⁵ and others⁶ are concerned by the piecemeal, if not naïve, perspective Christians hold toward evaluating the spiritual journey. In response, Engel with Viggo Søgaaard developed a model that would visualize a spiritual journey along a continuum. Calling it “the Great Commission in common dress”⁷ Engel viewed this as “a model of spiritual decision processes”⁸ (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Engel's Stages of Spiritual Decision (codified by the author from several of Engel's variations⁹)

- 8 Awareness of supreme being, no knowledge of gospel
- 7 Initial awareness of Gospel
- 6 Awareness of fundamentals of gospel
- 5 Grasp of implications of gospel
- 4 Positive attitude toward the gospel
- 3 Personal problem recognition
- 2 Decision to act
- 1 Repentance and faith in Christ
- New Birth: A new disciple is born**
- +1 Post-decision evaluation
- +2 Incorporation into the Body
- +3 Conceptual and behavioral growth
- +4 Communion with God
- +5 Stewardship

Many of the stages are self explanatory. However, some short notes on a few specific stages will be helpful to our present discussion:¹⁰

-6 A deepening awareness of the fundamentals of the Good News might include the traveler experiencing charity, forgiveness, graciousness, reciprocity, etc.. This could be exemplified in acts of mercy, sacrifice, justice, etc., which fulfill the Great Commandment (*Mark 12:31*) to “love your neighbor as yourself” (sometimes called the “cultural mandate”).

-5 This indicates the person understands the personal requirements of the Good News. Here is where major disconnects may occur, when people see good deeds but fail to grasp that the Good News has requirements and obligations upon the hearer.

New birth. God creates an intersection between the spiritual and physical words; and a new person is born (*John 3:3-8*).

+1 Here the person reviews what has happened and whether the decision was worth the effort and/or the emerging criticism. Some, after reevaluating their decision, lapse back to -3, -4 or further with either a decision not to act, or to reevaluate their positive attitude toward the Good News.

+2 If forward progress occurs a person will seek out a support network of fellow Christians.

+3 Here spiritual growth is observed in faith and action. Engel places in this stage traditions associated with new birth, such as adult baptism or confirmation.¹¹ However, Scot McKnight's observations indicate that some denominations might disagree with Engel's placing baptism at +3. McKnight emphasizes that some liturgical traditions place baptism earlier, at Engel's New Birth juncture.¹² And, he notes that though evangelicals and Pentecostals often view "personal decision" as the place of conversion, many mainline Protestants see conversion associated with a long nurturing journey (McKnight calls this "conversion through socialization"). Subsequently, depending on the tradition and the practice, baptism may be viewed by different denominations as occurring anywhere between Engel's stages of New Birth through +2.

+4 At this point Engel clouds the picture a bit, referring to this a stage as communion with God "through prayer and worship."¹³ Though he acknowledges that this happens earlier too, by stressing it

here Engel gives the unintended impression that supernatural encounter mostly flourishes later.¹⁴

Herein lays a weakness of the Engel Scale. For all of its popularity and durability, it is evident that it is more illustrative of the pre-conversion stages than it is with the post-conversion journey. And, since Engel suggests that both the pre-conversion and post-conversion processes are *equally* important,¹⁵ we are left in need of a more balanced picture. Robert Clinton's phases can help fill that gap but we will discover his process model is constrained as well.

Clinton's Process Model: Phases of Leadership Development

Another process model has been put forth by Fuller Seminary's Robert Clinton and designated "Six Phases of Leadership Development" (Figure 2).¹⁶

Figure 2: Clinton's Six Phases of Leadership Development¹⁷

I Sovereign foundations New Birth: A new disciple is born II Inner-life growth III Ministry maturation IV Life maturation V Convergence VI Afterglow
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A brief analysis will show that Clinton bests Engel in analysis of leadership development.¹⁸

I. *Sovereign Foundations*. During this phase God is preparing a leader through experiences and character traits.¹⁹

New Birth: A New Disciple is Born. Between Phase 1 and 2, Clinton sees “an all out surrender commitment, in which the would-be-leader aspires to spend a lifetime that counts for God.”²⁰ Here Engel offers more depth as he charts the minute, but important, mental steps that lead up to a “surrender commitment.” Therefore, Engel’s preparatory steps to this experience will contribute more robustly to our waypoint approach.

II. *Inner-life Growth.* In this phase Clinton describes the mentoring and modeling that the new Christian receives. Clinton neglects Engel’s insights into the post-birth evaluation, yet Clinton adds to our understandings the influence of both informal apprenticeships and formal training.²¹

III. *Ministry Maturation: Ministry as the Prime Focus of Life.* This phase occurs as the disciple senses ministry is increasingly becoming a focus of their life. The disciple is motivated to explore ministry options and spiritual giftings.²² At this juncture, Clinton offers the most satisfying insights, pointing out that much of the growth in the new disciple is self-directed, meaning the disciple must take it upon themselves to look for opportunities to volunteer, minister to others and evaluate effectiveness. Ministry is thus often organic, unpaid and unscripted.²³

IV. *Life Maturation: Gift-mix With Power.* Here Clinton offers a critical insight into the powerful synergy that is unleashed when a person finds a ministry that corresponds to their gifts.²⁴

V. *Everything Converges.* In this phase personality, training, experience, gifts and geographical location converge to release

ministry that is not only effective but also widely appreciated. Clinton points out that not all disciples reach this stage, but by just defining the stage Clinton gives us a mental picture of God's potential for the individual. "Ministry is maximized" sums up Clinton.

VI. *Afterglow*. This is a phase when a person's ministry is so influential over such an extended period of time, that the person enjoys the afterglow of effective ministry.

The Relevance of Waypoints

In search of a metaphor that codifies, contemporizes and synthesizes Engel and Clinton, I have discovered the relevance of waypoints. The term "waypoint" is a visual icon, placed on an electronic map to describe where a traveler is on their journey and what obstacles lay ahead. Popularized by Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) devices, a "waypoint" is a colloquial shorthand for the icon that "marks" on the GPS device where a traveler is on their journey.

More precisely, a "waypoint" is a visual icon that represents a position of longitude and latitude on a route-map or GPS-device. As a demarcation, it allows the traveler to find that locale again or to lead others to it. It is often some natural feature that the traveler wants to recall or revisit. Thus, for hikers a waypoint can be a waterfall, a scenic view or another stimulating feature along the route. The waypoint icon provides a secondary function as it helps the trekker realize where they in relation to their overall journey, noting what "features" lie behind and which lie ahead. In a similar manner, "spiritual waypoints" can help a traveler understand their location, progress and direction on a spiritual continuum.

Today many emerging church leaders use symbols and icons to depict and explain spiritual themes and principles. This is influenced by the pervasive use of icons in electronic mediums as well as the historical didactic use of icons in the church.²⁵ Therefore, visual depictions of the spiritual process (such as those by Engel, Clinton and the waypoint model) can have a revived didactic function.

And, the waypoint metaphor embraces a sense of experience and wonder, which in my mind better represents the intersection of the supernatural and the natural.²⁶ This is how I have defined a waypoint:

A waypoint is a position, not a phase nor a frozen marker. It tells where a traveler is in relation to other features on the road. It gives an indication of a general position on a route or journey. And, a waypoint can be different for each trekker. And, though a waypoint will always occur, because the precise route of the journey varies each time, the waypoint will appear in a different place for each trekker, i.e. indigenously and personally.

In addition, a waypoint may not be spaced at even lengths. Rather, the purpose of a waypoint is to help the traveler perceive where they are in relationship to the bigger picture of the journey. And, waypoints allow the companions that will accompany a traveler to gauge where they may intersect the traveler on her or his journey.²⁷

Waypoints: A Synthesis of Engel and Clinton

To begin to chart this new imagery necessitates those elements of Engel and Clinton that overlap be compared and synthesized. (Figure 3).

Figure 4 suggests a new depiction derived from the strengths of Engel and Clinton, but which combines the two, edits out some overlap and updates terminology.²⁸ I call this the Waypoints Model.

Figure 3: Engel's Stages and Clinton's Phases Compared²⁹



Engel's Stages of Spiritual Decision	Clinton's Six Phases of Leadership Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -8 Awareness of supreme being -7 Initial awareness of gospel -6 Awareness of fundamentals of the gospel -5 Grasp of implications of the gospel -4 Positive attitude toward gospel -3 Personal problem recognition -2 Decision to act -1 Repentance 	 <p data-bbox="730 920 1045 954">I Sovereign foundations</p>
<p data-bbox="189 1076 567 1111">New Birth: A Disciple is born</p>	<p data-bbox="617 1076 995 1111">New Birth: A Disciple is born</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +1 Post-decision evaluation +2 Incorporation into the Body +3 Conceptual and behavioral growth +4 Communion with God + 5 Stewardship 	 <p data-bbox="730 1232 982 1267">II Inner-life growth</p> <p data-bbox="693 1302 995 1336">III Ministry maturation</p> <p data-bbox="693 1345 932 1380">IV Life maturation</p> <p data-bbox="693 1388 894 1423">V Convergence</p> <p data-bbox="693 1432 869 1466">VI Afterglow</p>

Figure 4: The Waypoints Model (with Correlations to Engel and Clinton)

16	No awareness of supreme being (Engel)
15	Awareness of supreme being, no knowledge of Gospel (Engel)
14	Initial awareness of Gospel (Engel)
13	Awareness of fundamentals of Gospel (Engel)
12	Grasp implications of Gospel (Engel)
11	Positive attitude towards Gospel (Engel)
10	Personal problem recognition (Engel)
9	Decision to act (Engel)
8	Repentance and faith in Christ (Engel and Clinton)
7	New birth (Engel and Clinton)
6	Post-decision evaluation (Engel)
5	Incorporation into the Body (Engel and Clinton)
4	Spiritual foundations (Whitesel)
	+3 Conceptual and behavioral growth (Engel)
	+3.1 Sovereign Foundations (Clinton)
3	Inner-life growth (Clinton)
	+4.1 Communion with God (Engel)
	+5 Stewardship (Engel)
2	Ministry emergence (Clinton)
1	Influence emergence (Whitesel)
	Life Maturation (Clinton)
0	Convergence or Afterglow (Clinton)

Advantages of a Synthesized Waypoint Model

Advantage 1: A more holistic process model can help churches visualize how to expand outward from the waypoints they currently cover to address adjacent waypoints.

If a church intends to help spiritual travelers negotiate more of the journey, then it is important for church leaders not only to understand the waypoints they are helping spiritual travelers negotiate, but to comprehend any adjacent waypoints. The waypoint model provides a visual reminder of the scope of the journey and the typical progression.

Logic suggests that churches can help people move further along their journey if there are not “gaps” in a church’s coverage of that journey. For example, while a local church is assisting spiritual travelers well at one or two waypoints, it may not be addressing the next (or previous) waypoints sufficiently. This occurs because church leaders are largely unaware of the next phase of the spiritual traveler’s spiritual development. This lack of knowledge creates a gap in the church’s ministry and in the spiritual traveler’s journey. The result is that when churches offer a narrow band of ministry to spiritual travelers they can force the spiritual traveler to sever fellowship with one faith community in search of another that will take them to the next stage of spiritual development. Further illustrations of such gaps will be depicted in “Advantage 2.”

But, when a church can visualize a holistic map of the spiritual progress, then gaps can be observed and addressed. Once the gaps are

exposed a church can begin to expand outward to address adjacent waypoints, with a result being an increasing breadth and effectiveness in a church's ministry along a spiritual traveler's journey.

Advantage 2: When local churches focus on more than one waypoint, it not only helps spiritual travelers, but also helps churches retain congregants.

A danger arises if a church becomes a specialist in helping spiritual travelers negotiate only a few waypoints. Waypoints by their very definition are "points along the way." When a congregation becomes a specialist at any one, two or even three waypoints, the spiritual traveler is forced to make the unnatural step of leaving one fellowship to go in search another which can address the next waypoint on their journey. Let's look at three examples.

Church 1 is an urban church known for its actions on behalf of the poor. Seeing itself as a "Community Development Church" it has demonstrated the love of Christ in sacrificial actions to the community. Many non-Christians grow in their appreciation for God as a result. Though the church is often moderately familiar with Engel's stages, they are usually less familiar with Clinton's phases. When a community resident, Traveler A, encounters Waypoint 10 (Personal Problem Recognition) they seek a conversionary experience at Church 1. Because Church 1 does not consider itself a conversionist church (and may even be aloof toward those that are) the upcoming waypoints in Traveler A's spiritual development are downplayed. The spiritual traveler's journey has been interrupted. And, the traveler is faced with the unpleasant option of going elsewhere for the conversionary

waypoint they sense they need. Traveler A leaves Church 1, seeking help in navigating Waypoints 9-7 at Church 2.

Church 2 is an evangelical church, focusing a great deal upon the altar call and the accompanying prayer of salvation. Because its mission is to be a “Soul-winning Church,” Traveler A begins to attend in hopes of navigating Waypoints 9-7. At Church 2 the traveler finds subtle disparagement of Church 1. This is problematic because in Traveler A’s mind Church 1 was helpful. Moreover, Traveler A still has many friends at Church 1. Traveler A has a conversionary experience at Church 2, but because the church focuses on conversion there is not as much emphasis upon discipleship processes. Traveler A, who has a salvation experience in Church 2, may within a few years, or months, leave Church 2 to find a church that will help in those phases of discipleship that Church 2 ignores because of its focus on the conversionary processes surrounding Waypoints 9-7.

Church 3 is a church that emphasizes discipleship and leadership development. It was founded by Christians who were tired of what they perceived as an incomplete Christian experience in the “Community Development Churches” or “Soul-winning Churches” they once attended. Sometimes called “Cell Churches,” or “Body-life Churches” Church 3 is adept at fostering discipleship and accountability via a small group system. Because they focus on the post-conversionary discipleship process they usually embrace leadership models, such as Clinton’s stages of leadership. In Church 3 Traveler A eventually finds the spiritual maturation they sought (Waypoints 4-1).

The outcome is that during this process Traveler A has grown distant from the earlier actions (i.e. waypoints) that led up to this present stage. Traveler A often develops a distant, and sometimes critical opinion of Community Development Churches and Soul-winning Churches. The result is that disciples are being nurtured, but they grow without an appreciation for the marvelous interrelated and evolutionary complexity of the spiritual maturation process.

Conclusion: A Holistic Map to Navigate More Waypoints

While churches such as Church 1, Church 2 and Church 3 are proficient at helping people navigate some waypoints of the journey, a focus upon a narrow band of ministry can force disciples to sever connections with one church in order to move to the next church where their emerging spiritual needs will be addressed. Sometimes spiritual travelers will negotiate this gap, but other times they will not. I have encountered dozens of such people who have fallen through the spiritual gaps in our ministry nets.

A more complete process waypoint model, that does not just focus upon part of the journey, can help congregations visualize their coverage of the journey, the waypoints in which they are adept or inept and help them begin to work outward from the waypoints they cover well to adjacent waypoints. The result of the waypoint model is an inclusive and visual “map” of the spiritual journey. Built upon the important, yet partial work of Engel and Clinton, the waypoint model suggests a fusion that allows church leaders to identify and remove gaps in their coverage of the spiritual journey.

Today the church must better understand its role as holistic navigators. Such holism can be developed when church leaders visualize process models such as the waypoint model. The goal of this awareness is to assist churches in better participating in the *missio Dei* by increasing their awareness of congregational strengths and weaknesses that help “people of the way.”

¹ Esther de Waal, *Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 69.

² Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1989), 183.

³ *Delimitations*: This article will be delimited to the process models of James Engel and Robert Clinton. We will discover that Engel’s scale for all of its attractiveness and resilience, is weak on its description of post-conversionary events. Then we will look at Robert Clinton’s phases of leadership development, finding them much more robust in describing the process from new Christian to ministry effectiveness. We will also note that each model has either a pre-conversionary or post-conversionary minimalism that makes its holism unconvincing.

⁴ Engel and Norton, *What’s Gone Wrong With the Harvest?*, 45.

⁵ Engel, *Contemporary Christian Communication*, 66-68.

⁶ See Eugene Nida’s *Message and Mission* (1960) and McGavran’s *Understanding Church Growth* (1970). McGavran called the church’s avoidance of evaluation equivalent to creating a “universal fog” of empirical murkiness, 76-120.

⁷ Engel and Norton, *What’s Gone Wrong With the Harvest?*, 45.

⁸ James F. Engel, *The Church Growth Bulletin* (Fuller Institute of Church Growth, Pasadena, CA: 1973). Engel stressed that his decision scale emphasized how a church’s “communication ministries” must change as the traveler journeys through the spiritual decision process, *What’s Gone Wrong With the Harvest?*, 44-45. Unfortunately, the published designation, “Engel’s Scale of Spiritual Decision” clouds Engel’s emphasis upon the elastic role of the church’s communication, and thus this scale’s designation does not correspond to its content.

⁹ This version of Engel’s Scale of Spiritual Decision has been adapted by the author for the book, *Spiritual Waypoints: Helping Others*

Navigate the Journey (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2010), p. 226-227. I created this version from several of Engel's variations, c.f. James F. Engel and Wilbert Norton, *What's Gone Wrong With the Harvest? A Communication Strategy for World Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1975); 45, James F. Engel, *Contemporary Christian Communications: Its Theory and Practice* (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1979), 63-87, 225; James F. Engel and William A. Dyrness, *Changing the Mind of Missions: Where Have We Gone Wrong* (Westmont, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000), 100-101.

¹⁰ Taken from this author's more exhaustive analysis in *Spiritual Waypoints: Helping Others Navigate the Journey* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2010), p. 226-228.

¹¹ Engel, *Contemporary Christian Communications*, 81.

¹² McKnight tenders a helpful overview of when and how different denominations view baptism as corresponding to the conversionary experience. He notes that some liturgical traditions may view conversion as attached to liturgical acts such as baptism, the sacraments and "official rites of passage," Scot McKnight, *Turning to Jesus: The Sociology of Conversion in the Gospels* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 1-7.

¹³ Engel, *Contemporary Christian Communications*, 82

¹⁴ Engel sometimes talks about communion with God (+4) and Stewardship (+5) as subsets of +3 Conceptual and Behavioral Growth. Engel, *Contemporary Christian Communications*, 83; *What's Gone Wrong With The Harvest*, 45, 52-56.

¹⁵ Engel in *Contemporary Christian Communications*, 66-68.

¹⁶ *Spiritual Waypoints: Helping Others Navigate the Journey* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2010), p. 228-230.

¹⁷ Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*.

¹⁸ While Engel emphasizes spiritual disciplines, there is no guarantee in Engel's scale that spiritual maturity will correspond with these actions. For example, just because a person is experiencing Engel's +8 Stage of stewardship of resources, or +9 Stage of prayer, does not mean that person is actually growing in maturity. These are actions that should accompany maturity in faith, but do not necessarily do so. Thus Engel emphasizes the artifacts of the journey, but Clinton emphasizes their influence.

¹⁹ Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 31.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ While Clinton addresses the influence of personal mentoring, he does not address the influence of the Christian community to the degree of Engel. Research shows that the health of a church community is an important factor in fostering leadership development (Whitesel, *Growth by Accident, Death by Planning*, and *Inside the Organic Church*, along with parallels in the business world, Mary Jo Hatch and Majken Schultz, *The Dynamics of Organizational Identity* [Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004] and Mary Jo Hatch, Monika Kostera and Andrzej K. Kozminski, *Three Faces of Leadership: Manager, Artist, Priest* [Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005]).

²² This would be Engel's sub-stage of "discovery and use of gifts."

²³ For "A Comparison Between Institutionalization and Improvisation" see Whitesel, *Inside the Organic Church*, 119.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ For examples of the widespread use of icons in contemporary communication, see Whitesel, *Inside the Organic Church: Learning from 12 Emerging Congregations* (Abingdon Press, 2006).

²⁶ James D. G. Dunn emphasizes the awe and experience of the numinous when he states, "his spirit may be experienced in many diverse ways, both in non-rational ecstasy and through the mind, both in experiences of dramatically effective power and in compulsion to serve ..." *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study in the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 357-58.

²⁷ Ibid. 23-24.

²⁸ In the Waypoints Model (Figures 4 and 5) the stages and phases have less prominence and are "replaced with moveable waypoints that give a general understanding of where one is within a certain segment of their journey." Ibid. 232

²⁹ Ibid. 230-231.

FULL DISCLOSURE: JUSTICE AND EVANGELISM TOGETHER

George R. Hunsberger¹

Evangelism and justice—strange bedfellows, many would assume. Or perhaps, estranged lovers in a war for the loyalties of their children (i.e., all of us who bear the name of the Christ). In any case, a vision that sees them as symbiotic is hard to find. Somehow, the forces that would pry them apart have worked only too well. Each is damaged as a result.

If it matters to the church that we are defined by our calling to follow in the way of Jesus, fulfilling the mission of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, then we must pick up the broken pieces and find their wholeness once again. I suggest that a seriously biblical approach to either of these agendas leads directly and inevitably to the other. In fact, each one *is* the other.

Just Evangelism

Consider evangelism, for example. If, as the word implies, it has to do with communicating the good news announced in the Gospels, then it can only be by some selective blindness that it can be conceived to have nothing to do with justice. In recent decades, evangelism has gotten a bad name for itself precisely because of the reductionism that sees the gospel's good news in highly individualized terms. This gospel emphasized one's personal relationship with God, one's assurance of forgiveness in Christ, and one's hope for the future before

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and especially beyond death. That presentation of the gospel struggles even to reckon with the New Testament's sense that salvation is about the formation of the church as the people of God to be the token of the new humanity God is making. Farther from its grasp is the recognition that the good news in the Gospels is fundamentally an announcement about the life of the whole world and its destiny. And that touches directly on justice in the social fabric of the world.

To do justice (yes, double meaning intended) to the proclamation of the gospel in the New Testament, then, we have to go back to the four Gospels. In them, we find our best clues in the way Jesus himself announced what he called the 'gospel.' His public life and presence were oriented to this one theme: "The reign of God is at hand. Turn around and believe this good news" (Mark 1:14-15; cf. Matthew 4:23). That central message was intended then and is intended still today to call to mind all that the Jews of Jesus' day remembered of the promises of God to Israel and, through Israel, to all the nations. The words of Israel's prophets echo over and over in the Gospels: there comes a time when justice, peace and joy comes in full *shalom* (the Old Testament's pregnant term for "peace"). Whether from the lips of Mary and Zachariah, the anticipations of John the Baptizer, or the obedient echoes of Jesus' message as pairs of disciples moved among the villages, the news was that in the person of Jesus the reign of God was coming upon the world. And when it comes, destructive powers are overturned, the plight of the poor and oppressed is avenged, and inequities are righted.

The Gospel writers themselves noted that the news was being announced in a world in which Augustus was Caesar, Herod was King, and Jesus was a political threat needing to be eliminated. Precisely there, the reign of God was coming. In the end, the resurrection of Jesus acclaims that this one who was crucified by power is in fact the one in whom all divine authority resides, forever claiming the trust and loyalty of all the warring peoples of the earth. The world is being made new by the Spirit of God.

For evangelism, then, it is this gospel of the vision and plans of God that begs to be announced. The gospel Jesus preached about in his hometown synagogue was this: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, he has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19, NRSV). Even when it comes down to a conversation with an individual person, it is necessary to make clear that there is good news for that person because there is good news here for the life and future of the whole world.

Honest Justice

By the same token, any faithful Christian act in the pursuit of justice and peace among the peoples of the earth must be acknowledged to be an ‘evangelic’ act. For anyone, Christian or otherwise, visions of what justice requires and what fosters peace do not come from nowhere. They are always located. That is to say, they have arisen in some particular linguistic-cultural territory and they therefore are framed by particular sets of assumptions conditioned by

that place and time. Call it my postmodern sensibility, or simply the implications of the church's missionary encounters with the plurality of human cultures, but there is no neutral place to stand. Much as one might hold some belief that there is genuinely some universal notion of justice, it has to be acknowledged in the end that such a belief itself is conditioned by some tradition of human perception. In conversations about justice, whether within any one of the human traditions or between and among them, the plurality of particular mooring points is at play. It is best acknowledged to be so, instead of ignoring the fact. Presumptions, coercions, or hopes to the contrary, it is the nature of humanity's shared life that we navigate our major concerns in a dialogue of particularities.

What does this say about the nature of Christian participation in public conversation about how best to envision and pursue justice and peace in our world? First, we do so with the full recognition that like all others, we—whichever portion of the global church we happen to be—are located within the “webs of significance” our own culture provides.¹ These webs shape how think about justice or peace. Knowing this, we freely acknowledge it is so in our public discourse.

In addition, we acknowledge that something else is true. We are among those in our own place and time that have been grasped by the good news we've come to know about Jesus Christ, and that news has been at work in us to reframe how we see things. The scriptural narrative that “renders accessible to us the character, actions, and purposes of God” (as Lesslie Newbigin describes it²) is the particular grounding for anything we may commend on matters touching the life

of the world. This is, in a sense, a gospeled particularity within a cultural one—a particularity within a particularity. As much as our cultural location must be acknowledged, this particularity also demands to be acknowledged. We might be tempted to conduct ourselves otherwise, as though this were not the case, as though we are simply being objective with respect to a notion of justice we presume everybody shares. But that will not erase the effects of the particularities involved. Better to own them and acknowledge them in as particular a way as possible.

In that way, whether we offer a critique of injustices inherent within the present regimes of the world (formal or otherwise), or make proposals toward a more just social order, it comes in the form of full disclosure and honesty. We do this in an effort to convey as faithfully as we can the implications of *this* evangel, *this* good news, the news that the just and peace-filled reign of God promised for the world's future has broken in already in Jesus Christ. We claim no other ground than that. We humbly invite others to consider what this biblical vision suggests, even if they do not embrace this Christian faith, suggesting (and hoping) that they may find ground in their own religious or cultural frame to see things similarly. So there is room for, and in fact the necessity of, the practice of dialogue in our concern for justice and peace. Honest dialogue means acknowledging as fully as we know how the framing vision that guides our proposals. In other words, in our action toward justice, we identify the gospel out of which it grows.

Conclusion

Mark Labberton, in his book *The Dangerous Act of Worship*, puts evangelism and justice together in a particularly vivid way.³ It is his fundamental assertion that worship and justice are inseparably linked. In worship, we come to know more and more that this God whom we worship and praise is a God whose greatest passion is for justice. Worshipping such a God cannot but affect us. It plays us out into the world's life as those who, having worshipped such a God as this, have become more and more mirror images of what this God is like. We move with God's passions, making God-like responses in the face of injustices, and we gladly honor this God in the midst of it. The patterns of worship and justice in the church's life are not alien to each other, but embedded in each other.

In the same way, justice and evangelism cannot be held separate without doing irreparable damage to both. Their separation leaves us with a form of evangelism vacant of substance, and a quest for justice vacant of authority. Put positively, in our evangelism we announce the coming of justice upon the earth, and in our pursuit of justice we announce the One who is its author and measure. Full disclosure of this intimate union at every step along the way is where the church's faithful witness is to be found.

¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), 5ff.

² Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 59.

³ Mark Labberton, *The Dangerous Act of Worship: Living God's Call to Justice* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007).

MISSIONAL ACUITY: 20TH CENTURY INSIGHTS TOWARD A REDEPTIVE WAY OF SEEING

Christopher B. James¹

What kind of Christian spirituality is needed to foster and enliven missional living? This is one of the most pressing but oft neglected questions facing mission leaders and practitioners, as notorious burn-out rates highlight. This article takes mission to be the whole complex of practices by which Christians purposefully participate in God's redemption of all things and proposes a partial answer to the above question by developing a description of one of the critical elements of Christian spirituality for mission. This element is missional acuity, a way of seeing the world and oneself that makes possible, even inevitable, ongoing engagement in mission.

While some rightfully emphasize that any spirituality that is disconnected from active participation in the *missio Dei* will be fruitless, it is equally true that missional ventures without spiritual rootedness will eventually wither. While missional practices of service and evangelism are indeed essential to holistic, embodied Christian spirituality, these practices are not self-sustaining. Missional life is, in the end, contingent on a spirituality that cultivates the abilities to see beauty in creation and others, to perceive God present and at work in the world, and to know oneself as God's cooperative friend and partner. In order to live missionally as Jesus did, one must come to see as Jesus did—and as faithful disciples have throughout the

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ages. What did they see, and how might one cultivate this acuity? To answer this question, this article looks to four substantial 20th century writers—namely Dorothy Day, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Thomas Merton and Annie Dillard. Together they provide insights into how one acquires a new way of seeing and wisdom regarding the characteristics of a deeply Christian way of seeing.

Annie Dillard

Among 20th century writers, one would be hard pressed to find anyone with a more disciplined and profound manner of seeing than Annie Dillard. At 29 she published *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, an acclaimed piece of nature writing, which won the 1974 Pulitzer Prize for general non-fiction. While clearly focused on rich descriptions that emerged from meticulous attention to her rural Virginia environs, her writing is ripe with profound reflections on life and theology. Thus, Dillard is justified in fancying herself something of an anchorite whose object of contemplation is the natural world. And she saw it deeply.

Dillard identified two distinct ways of seeing. The first is enacted through verbalization. Her writing is a testimony to the power of articulating what is seen. As Dillard reports: “unless I call my attention to what passes before my eyes, I simply won’t see it.”¹ This first manner of seeing is about analyzing and prying; it is an active investigation.² Deliberate curiosity feeds this inquiry with questions that demand more detail, finer nuance and more evocative descriptions. Like a wine connoisseur who enriches the sophistication of her taste buds by learning to identify ever more subtle tastes and

smells, the one who presses to describe what they perceive in rich detail is rewarded with heightened acuity.

As significant as this first manner of seeing is to Dillard, she seemed to prize more dearly a second. In contrast to the grasping of the first way of seeing, this manner of perception “involves a letting go.”³ Dillard compared the first way of seeing to walking with a camera, moving from shot to shot, gauging the light on a calibrated meter. The second way is walking without a camera, and it is then that “my own shutter opens, and the moment’s light prints on my own silver gut.”⁴ This second way of seeing postures one as “an unscrupulous observer”—open, unguarded, and impressionable.⁵ The seer is no longer the investigator, one step removed from the scene, but is now a full participant in its reality.

Dillard attributed this second, receptive manner of seeing to “saints and monks of every order East and West, under every rule and no rule, discalced and shod.”⁶ It is, then, the pearl of great price, and she confessed willingness to “stagger barefoot across a hundred deserts” following anyone who might give its secret to her.⁷ Yet, she acknowledged that such a venture would be foolhardy since the pearl can be *found* but not *sought*. That is, “although it comes to those who wait for it, it is always, even to the most practiced and adept, a gift and a total surprise.”⁸ This unexpectable nature in no way undermines the importance of training oneself for its arrival. Indeed, the saints teach us that we must hush the inner monologue in order to receive it. This “effort is really a discipline requiring a lifetime of dedicated struggle.”⁹

Dillard's instruction on seeing yields two valuable insights into how a new spiritual acuity is pursued. First, she highlights the importance of *learning* to see. Seeing is far more than receiving light into the retina; it is the whole process that makes meaning and constructs reality. Jesus himself hinted at this when he spoke of both those who have eyes that see and those who see but are nonetheless blind.¹⁰ It seems that Jesus attributed this ability to see to a spiritual posture, which is precisely what Dillard sought to cultivate in a disciplined manner after the pattern of the saints. Importantly, she acknowledged the commitment required to persevere through the long struggle of this learning.

The second profitable insight from Dillard complements the rigor required of those who wish to see. According to Dillard, revelation is always a surprise gift. It is pure grace. It is here that it becomes obvious that sight-training is a bona fide spiritual discipline. While the practice is not meritorious in itself, it nonetheless opens one to receive God's grace. While active discipline is required to habitualize the proper posture toward life, this disposition is fundamentally a passive one of quiet openness and receptivity. As such, the moment of perception is "less like seeing than like being seen for the first time, knocked breathless by a powerful glance."¹¹ This experience of seeing as "being seen" highlights the true object of our observation: God's self as it is present and active in the world. Perhaps it is for this reason that Dillard attributed the ability to see truly to those who deeply love and understand the object of their gaze.¹² This acquired way of seeing is no fantasy but rather genuine

perception. As Dillard noted, “When I see this way, I see truly.”¹³ Ultimately, what we are striving to learn to see is the One who is ever seeing us. While Dillard’s interest was not in connecting her reflections on seeing with missionality, she nonetheless points in the direction of this valuable conclusion: *Cultivating missional acuity requires intentional discipline toward a posture ready to welcome revelation, which arrives as a gift of grace, as the very gaze of God.*

Dorothy Day

Dorothy Day (1897-1980) was a social activist, Catholic convert, and writer who, through the Catholic Worker movement she co-founded in the 1930s, spent decades serving among the poor and homeless. Day picks up where Dillard leaves us and connects seeing the divine in nature with seeing the divine in persons, especially those in need. Writings from Day’s early years testify to her attentiveness to the natural world, which she attributed to Forster, her once husband.¹⁴ Strikingly, she even credited this learned attentiveness with catalyzing her conversion: “His ardent love of creation brought me to the Creator of all things.”¹⁵

After becoming a Catholic, Day’s perception broadened beyond that of Forster’s as she deliberately chose to see Jesus “disguised and masked in the midst of men, hidden among the poor, among the sick, among prisoners, among strangers.”¹⁶ Far from merely asserting that we ought to be mindful of others because it “might be Christ who stays with us, comes to see us, takes up our time” or because “these people remind us of Christ,” she voiced the

conviction that “they *are* Christ, asking us to find room for Him, exactly as He did at the first Christmas.”¹⁷ Thus, we are “not born too late” to serve Christ physically for we can do it “by seeing Christ and serving Christ in friends and strangers, in everyone we come in contact with.”¹⁸

Notably, Day claimed for herself no special ability to see Christ in a physical form in the poor. Recognizing Christ was not, for her, a mystical experience as for Elizabeth of Hungry whose welcomed leper was physically transfigured into Christ. Yet, by her tireless confession of the reality of the poor as Christ, she made it a habitual thought. She referred to this discipline, borrowing from Brother Lawrence, as “practicing the presence of God” in which she reminded herself that “He is with us in our kitchens, at our tables, on our breadlines, with our visitors, on our farms.”¹⁹ Thus when she observed a “ragged horde” her ingrained response was to think: “These are Christ’s poor.”²⁰

Dorothy Day offers two contributions to the development of missional acuity. First is the centrality of seeing Christ in other humans. There can be little doubt that it was this doctrine which was the source of her lifework, as it appears repeatedly throughout her writings. Inasmuch as missional living is largely manifest by a profound love and service toward humankind generally, and individual human beings in particular, the cultivated perception of Christ as each person we encounter is indispensable. Indeed, it echoes St. Patrick’s breastplate prayer that petitions to hear Christ in all who speak and be seen as Christ by all who we meet.

Second, Day exposes the role that confession and habit of mind play in cultivating missional sight. More precisely, she demonstrates the role of living toward the realization of doctrine in repatterning ones perception. Day admitted that apart from Christ's own testimony it would seem "raving lunacy to believe that if I offer a bed and food and hospitality to some man or woman or child...that my guest is Christ" but she took this fact on the authority of Scripture and tradition.²¹ Her deeply held belief was the equivalent of genuine perception. By inverting the colloquialism, we capture Day's lesson on this point: Believing is seeing.

Summarizing what Day adds, we can say that *missional acuity includes the essential perception of Christ in humankind and is cultivated by deliberate cleaving to reality as presented by Scripture and tradition even when it remains beyond direct apprehension.*

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) was a French philosopher, Jesuit priest and scientist. While a number of his writings were censured by the *Magesterium*, recent popes have praised his ideas, some of which were influential in the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. In *The Divine Milieu*, Teilhard presented himself as one who has "sought to teach how to see God everywhere, to see him in all that is most hidden, most solid, and most ultimate in the world."²² Indeed, according to Teilhard, "God is as pervasive and perceptible as the atmosphere in which we are bathed. He encompasses us on all sides, like the world itself. What prevents you,

then, from enfolding him in your arms? Only one thing: your inability to see him.”²³

Teilhard’s commitment to training others in this acuity stemmed from his belief that it is intimately tied to the two great tasks of life. The first human task, which he described as making one’s own soul, is primarily a task of spiritual formation. One crucial element of this soul-making task, as hinted at above, is learning to see the omnipresent God. Teilhard asserted that it is here on earth that “we give ourselves the eyes and heart which a final transfiguration will make the organs of a power of adoration, and of a capacity for beatification.”²⁴

This first task is a formational prerequisite to a second more discernibly missional project. Equipped with eyes that see God, Teilhard believed one becomes capable of actualizing St. Paul’s injunction: “Whatever you do, do it in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”²⁵ In the wake of this new possibility, human “work” is elevated from its status as a mundane and meaningless chore to a level of cosmic significance; each person’s lifework can and should constitute a newly composed “opus” which contributes to “*the completing of the world*.”²⁶ The optimism of Teilhard’s language betrays the realized eschatology that undergirded his vision. Stating his lofty vision in the extreme he spoke of human vocation as both building the Pleroma and making Christ perfect.²⁷ Far from mere passengers on a planet piloted by God toward the eschaton, we must learn to see ourselves as agents of God’s ongoing creative, incarnational, and redemptive work.²⁸

Teilhard's contribution to our growing understanding is singular but irreplaceable. *Missional acuity includes a renewed perception of the self (and I would add of the whole community of God) as an incarnation of Christ*²⁹ and catalyst of the Reign of God.

Thomas Merton

Thomas Merton, the widely-known Trappist monk and author of numerous books, including his 1948 bestselling autobiography, will serve as the final source for this inquiry into a manner of seeing which can animate missional living. As a contemplative, Merton made a point of contradicting a popular misconception about the saints as those who were so absorbed in God that they were blind to all else.³⁰ This error imagines contemplatives as stone-faced stoics incapable of empathy and indifferent to beauty. On the contrary, Merton asserted that it "was because the saints were absorbed in God that they were truly capable of seeing and appreciating created things and it was because they loved Him alone that they alone loved everybody."³¹ Here we encounter echoes of Dillard's consciousness of the natural world and Day's attentiveness to humankind.

Reminiscent of Day's thinking, Merton suggested that if "we believe in the Incarnation of the Son of God, there should be no one on earth in whom we are not prepared to see, in mystery, the presence of Christ."³² As a distinctive nuance on this theme, Merton highlighted the ability of the saints to perceive virtue and goodness in even the greatest sinners.³³ Here Merton offered something more easily attainable than Day in that the mind's eye can be trained to spot traces

of virtue more quickly than to accomplish the daunting task of seeing all people as Christ incarnate, though this remains the higher goal.

More importantly, Merton offered a dynamic complement to the insights gained from both Dillard and Day. While these authors imply a movement from the deep perception of nature and/or people toward perception of God, Merton revealed a corresponding movement from contemplative awareness of God toward a deepened vision of nature and people. Together, this trio presents a reciprocal relationship between attentiveness to nature and people on the one hand and attentiveness to God on the other. According to Merton, as we bathe in the contemplative awareness of God we gain heightened senses for perceiving the beauty and dignity of nature and humankind, and as we train our eyes to see the created world and its inhabitants deeply, we are led to an increasing apprehension of God's presence.

Merton stressed that it is not adequate to conceive of contemplation as simply gazing upon God because a contemplative type of vision "sees 'without seeing' and knows 'without knowing.'"³⁴ This unspeakable sight is resonant with Dillard's second way of seeing which she likens to the experience of being arrested by the powerful gaze of another.³⁵

For Merton, a contemplative way of seeing leads to mission. He explained:

The eyes of the saint make all beauty holy and the hands of the saint consecrate everything they touch to the glory of God, and the saint is never offended by anything and judges no man's sin because he does not know sin. He knows the mercy of God. He knows that

his own mission on earth is to bring that mercy to all men.³⁶

In stating this, Merton moved beyond his resonance with Dillard and Day toward constructing a view of Christian vocation that sounds similar to the teachings of Teilhard. As with Teilhard, Merton claimed that both the commission of the everyday saint as Christ's messenger of reconciliation and the capacity of contemplation to help one "see and understand the work He wants done," is enveloped within a larger portrait of life lived in the Kingdom of God.³⁷ According to Merton, the real purpose of meditation is to "enter into conscious and loving contact with God."³⁸ This "experimental knowledge of God which is given to those who love Him perfectly" is the paramount experience of the human being, yet it is not an experience that so absorbs the human such that the human's activities cease. Rather, Merton regards it the highest vocation to be called to share one's contemplation so that others might know God.³⁹ This relationality alone is the *telos* of practicing the presence of God. Thus, contemplation is not a bare tool for empowering missional living but a practice that fosters incorporation into the life of a mercy-giving God. Teilhard's words describe Merton's ideas well on this point when Teilhard declared that it is in this intimate union that "every human life" becomes "a life in common with the life of Christ."⁴⁰

Practical Implications for Missional Acuity

Before highlighting two practices that can help to cultivate missional acuity it will be helpful to summarize what has been learned

from these 20th century authors. *Missional acuity is the intimate, experimental knowledge of God that enables one to see both 1) God's presence and activity in the world, especially through nature and people which are recognized as bearers of virtue and the presence of Christ, and 2) the missional identity of oneself and the people of God as redemptive agents of Christ and instruments of the Reign of God's realization. Missional acuity arrives as a gift of sheer grace, but the ability to welcome it is cultivated through persistent training, resolute confession of reality as revealed through Scripture and Christian tradition, and contemplation of God as the experience of being the recipient of God's gaze.*

While innumerable practices might be proposed toward the cultivation of missional acuity, in conclusion I will briefly note two that seem particularly potent. First, since awareness of the presence and activity of God in the world is the core skill of missional acuity, it will be essential for a missional spirituality to include a regular practice of attending to this reality. The Prayer of Examen, mapped out by Ignatius of Loyola in his *Spiritual Exercises*, is a practice of precisely this variety. In the Prayer of Examen, time is taken daily to prayerfully review the events, encounters and emotions of the day and to notice God's grace or invitation as well as God's nearness or apparent absence. Modifications of this practice abound in contemporary application, and one critical amendment (or perhaps emphasis) can enhance the efficacy of the Examen in fostering missional identity and living. In addition to reflecting upon the day as the sphere in which God's love was extended to oneself and upon the

response given, the inclusion of prayerful recollection with the following questions may prove missionally formative: When did I experience God's invitation to be an agent of God's redemptive love toward another person or creature? When did I glimpse others, human or otherwise, serving faithfully as representatives of Christ, knowingly or not? When did I feel God's anguish over the brokenness of the world and people God loves? Following each of these questions it would be appropriate to also consider: How did I respond?

A second practice toward cultivation of missional acuity is familiar to the North American evangelical tradition and can deeply enrich the practice of Examen. Regularly praying by name for those within one's sphere of relationship who do not know or follow Jesus is a simple but powerful reminder of one's identity as an ambassador of Christ "as though God were making his appeal through us" (2 Cor. 5:20). This practice has an unfortunate danger, as sadly evident within some circles, of precipitating pride and objectifying those in need of salvation as "targets." Thus, it ought to be practiced along with disciplined recognition following the insights of Day and Merton. Namely, prayers for "the lost" must be paired with a disciplined devotion to seeing and celebrating their virtues as well as the recognition that these are Christ himself incarnate. As these persons are held before the mind's eye, they should be imagined (and thus seen truly) not only as those to whom Christ appeals through us but also those through whom Christ appeals to us.

This essay has developed missional acuity as one of the elements foundational to a Christian spirituality capable of fostering

and sustaining missional living. Missional acuity is the ability to see God at work in the world and to perceive oneself as an agent of God's redemption. Though it is a gift of pure grace, its reception and cultivation calls for intentionality in the form of spiritual disciplines such as the two practices that have been suggested. While missional acuity promises to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of Christian mission, its greatest value lies in what it offers to those who pursue it, for there can be no greater gift than to see God and no more affirming identity than to know oneself as a cooperative partner with God in the redemption of all things.

¹ Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 33.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 35.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Matthew 13 and John 9.

¹¹ Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, 36.

¹² Ibid., 20.

¹³ Ibid., 34.

¹⁴ Dorothy Day, *By Little & By Little: The Selected Writings of Dorothy Day*, ed. Alfred A. Knopf (New York: Orbis Books, 1983), 23.

¹⁵ Ibid., 25.

¹⁶ Ibid., 6.

¹⁷ Ibid., 97.

¹⁸ Ibid., 96.

¹⁹ Ibid., 92.

²⁰ Ibid., 41.

²¹ Ibid., 95.

²² Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 9.

²³ Ibid., 8-9.

²⁴ Ibid., 23.

²⁵ Ibid., 12.

²⁶ Ibid., 24.

²⁷ Ibid., 9.

²⁸ Ibid., 26.

²⁹ While this phrase is dangerously open to heretical interpretation, I find it consistent with Paul's "body of Christ" language, and helpful in provoking a sense of missional (though not messianic) identity.

³⁰ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1972), 23.

³¹ Ibid., 23.

³² Ibid., 296.

³³ Ibid., 60.

³⁴ Ibid., 1.

³⁵ Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, 36.

³⁶ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 24-25.

³⁷ Ibid., 33, 270-271.

³⁸ Ibid., 217,

³⁹ Ibid., 271.

⁴⁰ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, 12.

PREACHING THE APOCALYPSE: INVITATION TO PRAYER AND DISCIPLESHIP

Dwight Judy and Whitney Starkey¹

The Challenge: Editor's Note

Eschatology has long been connected to evangelism. This can be seen in scholarly writings on evangelism as well as in popular evangelistic materials. For scholars, the primary eschatological question focuses on understanding how followers of Jesus Christ can live “between the times,” embodying the Reign of God that has already been inaugurated through the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ while also looking toward the final consummation of God’s purposes in creation. This line of inquiry can give rise to calls for a more thorough catechesis of people who desire to join the church or to enjoinders for Christians to work against oppressive economic and political structures. For popular authors, the emphasis is often on how to read the signs of the coming apocalypse and prepare accordingly. This leads to predictions of the end, calls for conversion to Christ lest one be “left behind,” and often to large public displays with which to attract the attention of those people who are unaware of the impending judgment of God.

It is no surprise that most people in the broader culture are acquainted with the popular view of eschatology rather than the scholarly one. Aside from the fact that popular eschatology is

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intentionally presented to a broader audience than its scholarly counterpart, its message is also a gripping one. It offers a story that makes sense of phenomena around the world, from mass die-offs of animals to natural disasters to wars, famines, and pestilences. This story also offers a clear and easily adopted means of extricating oneself from these difficulties. In a world that genuinely does seem out-of-control, this message gives a sense of order and direction.

Bolstering the popular view of eschatology is that fact that the Bible contains apocalyptic literature. Scattered throughout both Testaments there are tantalizing and mysterious passages that draw in readers, seeming to portend the very problems that trouble the planet today. This seems to offer irrefutable proof of understanding eschatology in this way, and it undergirds evangelism based on such eschatology.

Certainly, those who present the popular view of eschatology do so out of their own understanding of what it means to love their neighbors. If one truly believes God is coming in judgment against the world and its inhabitants, and that God has nonetheless made provision for people to be saved from the coming wrath, is it not the most loving thing one can do to preach this offer of salvation? Should not this offer of salvation be balanced by explaining the horrors that await those who refuse it? Anything less would be cruel, indeed.

Still, for a great many Christians, the depiction of God as One who is so angry – who primarily focuses on destroying, with even grace understood as ancillary to wrath because the purpose of grace is simply to turn aside the anger of God – is difficult for them to accept.

While it is unwise for Christians to lose sight of God calling creation, and especially humanity, to account, it is equally dangerous to ignore the grace of God in order to focus on God's wrath. Both views give anemic pictures of God. Consequently, those who follow these views also offer anemic forms of evangelism – sharing something less than the good news that is grounded firmly in the nature of God.

What, then, ought to be the role of evangelism when faced with the need for explanations concerning the great problems of the earth? How can Christians make sense of their own Scriptural passages about the apocalypse without giving way to a poorly conceived doctrine of God? Here is where the scholarly view of evangelism can help, especially at the nexus point of evangelism and spiritual formation.

Dr. Dwight Judy, Professor of Spiritual Formation at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, suggests that one way Christians might link their day-to-day desire to share the good news with eschatology is through demonstrating a life of hope, trust, and vulnerability. If Christians can practice the spiritual disciplines, especially prayer, in the midst of their daily lives, they will be far more capable of both withstanding the great troubles of the world and providing a witness to others of how to remain peaceful and focused in the midst of disasters. Put simply, Christians ought to live faithfully now if they desire to be faithful in times of great distress. In living this way, Christians will earn credibility to be heard by others, especially in times of distress.

The first step in connecting this call to spiritual formation with evangelism is to help form the evangelists themselves. To this end,

Judy offers the following two sermons. The first sermon was presented by Judy. The second sermon was preached by Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary Master of Divinity student Whitney Starkey. The first sermon shows how even a scriptural text on destruction can be used as an invitation for prayer and spiritual formation throughout life's challenges. The sermon incorporates the day's intercessory prayer time in a call-response manner, which the congregation readily adopted in Judy's actual preaching of the sermon. The second sermon shows the power of the apocalyptic text to move us toward the call to discipleship and commitment to Christ. While incorporating scholarly insights, the sermons are meant for a popular audience, seeking to engage otherwise difficult texts in winsome and witty ways which will call evangelists to greater spiritual formation in their own lives.

Pray Always! (delivered 11/3/11 at the Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary Chapel by Dwight Judy)

Mt 24:1-14. The full text was read. The sermon begins with the following verses read again by the preacher.

For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many. 6 You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but [do not be] not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 7 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are the beginning of birth pains.

The Apocalyptic vision related in the 24th chapter of Matthew is either a prediction of Jesus regarding the destruction of the temple in

Jerusalem in 70 A.D. or, as Matthew's Gospel was written after this event, the text seeks to make sense of that cataclysm so shortly after the death of Jesus. Yet even in these early times in scripture, it seemed that the return of Jesus, so much longed for, was not happening as quickly as some had assumed. Already it seems the END TIMES had to be seen as the IN BETWEEN TIMES. And so it has been ever since, in spite of those who would claim that the end time is imminent this year or next year.

But, there are plenty of wars, rumors of wars, and those claiming Messianic status! Can we come to hear these things again and again and “not be alarmed?” “All these are the beginning of birth pains” according to Jesus. His language is reiterated in Paul's understanding of the cosmic hope for God's redemption of the whole creation in Romans 8. I paraphrase: “The sufferings of the present age are birth pains of the new creation! We are saved, though only in hope, while we await God's redemption of our whole body, indeed of the whole creation.” So, when we hear of wars and rumors of war, or nation rising up against nation, of famines and earthquakes, can these be reminders that God is still at work, still creating the earth, still seeking to bring about the vision of human peace, of *shalom*, of kindness, in all realms of human life – in politics, in societies, in families, even (God help us) in our institutional churches?

During the next three centuries after the writing of the end times in Matthew, the early Desert Mothers and Fathers were learning how to live in between the times, as their faithful practices gave rise to monasticism in desert regions of Palestine, Syria, and Egypt. In his

book, *The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal* Herbert Workman described their challenging task in these words: “The monk, whether in the East or the West, was the voice in the wilderness crying the lost truth of the worth of one soul” over and against the “collectivism” taking place “both in Church and State.”¹ May we reach for their wisdom in the midst of the current forms of collectivism that threaten human dignity, whether in our political life or in the life of the church.

Around 380 A.D. John Cassian traveled among these early desert communities and recorded many of the stories of their lives. Their answer to the troubles of the day was prayer. The following encounter with Abba Isaac, one of the teachers of John Cassian, describes the development of the practice of constant prayer. Abba Isaac uses the leading verse of Psalm 69 as his appeal to Christ:

[Slide projected on chapel screen at this point in the sermon: **“O God, make haste to my rescue; Lord, come to my aid.”**]

Here is Abba Isaac’s description of his use of this prayer phrase.

I am affected by the passion of gluttony. I ask for food of which the desert knows nothing, and in the squalid desert there are wafted to me odors of royal dainties, and I find that even against my will I am drawn to long for them. I must at once say: **“O God, make haste to my rescue; Lord, come to my aid.”**

Weakness hinders me when wanting severer fasts, on account of the assaults of the flesh, or dryness of the belly and constipation frightens me. That the fire of carnal lust may be quenched without the remedy of a stricter fast, I must pray: **“O God, make haste to my rescue; Lord, come to my aid.”**

When I want to apply myself to reading, a headache interferes and stops me, and at the third hour sleep

glues my head to the sacred page, an overpowering desire to sleep forces me to cut short the rule for the Psalms: in the same way I must cry out: **“O God, make haste to my rescue; Lord, come to my aid.”**

I am tried by being puffed up by . . . vainglory, and pride, and my mind with subtle thoughts flatters itself somewhat on account of the coldness and carelessness of others: In order that this dangerous suggestion of the enemy may not get the master over me, I must pray with all contrition of heart: **“O God, make haste to my rescue; Lord, come to my aid.”**

Perhaps wandering thoughts careen about the soul like boiling water, and I cannot contest them, nor can I offer prayer without silly mental images interrupting it; I feel so dry that I seem incapable of spiritual feeling, and many sighs and groans cannot save me from dreariness: I must say: **“O God, make haste to my rescue; Lord, come to my aid.”**

Again, I feel that by the visitation of the Holy Spirit I have gained purpose of soul, steadfastness of thought, keenness of heart, with an ineffable joy and transport of mind, and in the exuberance of spiritual feelings I have perceived by a sudden illumination from the Lord an abounding revelation of most holy ideas which were formerly altogether hidden from me: in order that it may linger for a longer time I must often and anxiously exclaim: **“O God, make haste to my rescue; Lord, come to my aid.”**

Encompassed by nightly horrors of devils I am agitated and am disturbed by the appearances of unclean spirits, my very hope of life and salvation withdrawn by the horror of fear. Flying to the safe refuge of this verse, I will cry out with all my might: **“O God, make haste to my rescue; Lord, come to my aid.”**

Then the Lord restores and consoles me, and suddenly I can dare to go out to face the enemy and provoke them to flight when a moment before I was trembling with fear of death and shuddering in mind and body at their touch or proximity. To abide by God's grace in this strength and courage, I must say with my whole heart: **"O God, make haste to my rescue; Lord, come to my aid."**

We must then *ceaselessly* and *continuously* pour forth the prayer of this verse, in adversity that we may be delivered, in prosperity that we may be preserved and not puffed up. Let the thought of this verse, I tell you, be [reckoned] over in your breast *without ceasing*. Whatever work you are doing, or office you are holding, or journey you are going, *do not cease* to chant this. When you are going to bed, or eating, and in the last necessities of nature, think on this. *This thought in your heart may be to you a saving formula*, and not only keep you unharmed by all attacks of devils, but also purify you from all faults and earthy stains, and lead you to that invisible and celestial contemplation and carry you on to that ineffable glow of prayer, of which so few have any experience.²

In the midst of our own times of travail with increasing collectivism of church and state, it is very tempting to become cynical, to become alarmed, anxious, and despairing. Instead, at every nudge of fear may we too learn to cry out as Abba Isaac did: **"O God, make haste to my rescue; Lord, come to my aid."**

[Slide Change: Photo of statue of Thomas Hooker]

On the calendar of the church's saints, today we honor Richard Hooker who lived in last half of the 16th century in England, in a time of great struggle within the life of the church, at a time when people were still being put to death for holding various forms of Christian

views in England and throughout Europe. Richard Hooker's own family was torn apart by the division between those following the more Catholic version of faith practiced in the Church of England and the Puritans. He is attributed as a leader, alongside Thomas Cranmer and Matthew Parker, as laying the foundation of Anglican theology and practice. The many saints whom we honor did not live in easier times than our own. They, too, lived in times of war and rumors of war, in times of many people claiming Messianic status, in times of earthquakes and famines. They may well have despaired, as we are tempted to do, but these saintly ones also held the vision of God as a transcendent hope for human love, for communities of peace and justice to arise, for kindness and gentleness to have the final word. They lived in the spirit of Christ in their time.

[Slide Change: **“O God, make haste to my rescue; Lord, come to my aid.”**]

So, let us join this day the chorus of hope that echoes throughout Christian history –

During the Arab spring and fall, when great uncertainty pervades the nations of the Middle East, let us cry out: **“O God, make haste to my rescue; Lord, come to my aid.”**

When our national leadership is fractured, knowing we are up against the pains of childbirth of a new global economy, we cry out: **“O God, make haste to my rescue; Lord, come to my aid.”**

When the leaders of our denominations are very anxious about the future, let us hold our church bodies in prayer, particularly the United Methodist General Conference coming in 2012, as we cry out:

“O God, make haste to my rescue; Lord, come to my aid.”

When our national discourse becomes focused only in discordant sound bites, we cry out: **“O God, make haste to my rescue; Lord, come to my aid.”**

When we hear of floods in Thailand, of tsunamis in Indonesia and Japan, devastating earthquakes in Haiti and Turkey; when we wonder at the strange anomalies of threatening weather patterns in our own nation of floods, droughts, hurricanes, and blizzards, do we only fear or do we cry out: **“O God, make haste to my rescue; Lord, come to my aid.”**

When we suffer alongside those who are in physical or mental difficulties, who cannot seem to find a cure (and whom we silently name in our hearts), we cry out: **“O God, make haste to my rescue; Lord, come to my aid.”**

When we see the beauty of the fall colors, the rapture of the fields in bounty, the crisp change with the air, reminding us that the earth itself is always in childbirth, the seasons reminding us of the perpetual renewal of the earth, may we linger in joy as we cry out: **“O God, make haste to my rescue; Lord, come to my aid.”**

As we wonder at the earth’s capacity to support 7 billion people now with predictions of many more billions coming soon, we might cave into fear, or can we unleash creative responses by incessantly crying out: **“O God, make haste to my rescue; Lord, come to my aid.”**

As we watch with those who are pregnant or have just given birth, may we hold our fears and hopes together as we cry out: **“O**

God, make haste to my rescue; Lord, come to my aid.”

As we lovingly hold those who are dying, gently sitting with family members making their vigil, whispering words of comfort and resurrection hope in the ears of those passing through this veil of earthly to heavenly life, let us pray: **“O God, make haste to my rescue; Lord, come to my aid.”**

As we hold those who have suffered loss of marriage, loss of dreams, loss of jobs, even loss of a beloved one to death, we remind one another that in Christ new life can come, that this suffering is also the pain of childbirth of the new world to come, as we pray together: **“O God, make haste to my rescue; Lord, come to my aid.”**

So, as we approach the remembrance of all of the saints, let us declare again, that even in this age, when there are so many false Messiahs, even in this age of wars and rumors of wars, even in this age when nation lifts up sword against nation, God is at work, seeking to bring the birth of a world of peace and justice. And we may perhaps receive a glimpse of this vast hope, as every moment we keep praying: **“O God, make haste to my rescue; Lord, come to my aid.”**

Run to God³ (delivered 11/10/11 at the Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary Chapel by Whitney Starkey)

Matthew 24: 15-28

15 "So when you see the desolating sacrilege standing in the holy place, as was spoken of by the prophet Daniel (let the reader understand), 16 then those in Judea must flee to the mountains; 17 the one on the housetop must not go down to take what is in the house; 18 the one in the field must not turn back to get a coat.

19 Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days! 20 Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. 21 For at that time there will be great suffering, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. 22 And if those days had not been cut short, no one would be saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. 23 Then if anyone says to you, 'Look! Here is the Messiah!' or 'There he is!'--do not believe it. 24 For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. 25 Take note, I have told you beforehand. 26 So, if they say to you, 'Look! He is in the wilderness,' do not go out. If they say, 'Look! He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. 27 For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 28 Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

Harold Camping is a recently retired Christian radio personality for Family Radio Station, based in California. He received a civil engineering degree from Berkley in 1942, bought a radio station with a few friends in 1958, and on May 21, 1988, he predicted the end of the world would come, then again on September 6, 1994, and again on May 21, 2011, and even more recently, again on October 21, 2011. Those who believed in what he had to say were sent out in droves to proselytize this doomsday message, warning all that the end was near. Several of them left their homes, their families, and their jobs so they could pass out fliers outside train stations warning all to get right or else.

Well, October 21st has come and gone just like the days before it, and while it may in fact be the end of the world for those followers

who had no choice but to return to the families they had left behind, it has done nothing to tame the hellfire and brimstone evangelists. Armed with either a sandwich board or a public access television spot, there are many of our Christian brothers and sisters who interpret tsunamis, tornados, war and famine as signs of the coming of the eschaton, the end of the world.

And I have got to be honest, I was with them for a second. When I got an email from the Dean of the Chapel telling me that the lectionary passage that I had to preach on was the desolating sacrilege from Matthew, I, too, thought it was the end of the world. Who doesn't love a doomsday sermon, or much less having to write one? Were you listening to what we've got to work with? "Woe to those who are pregnant or nursing?" Wonderful. "Great suffering, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now. . . ." Awesome. "Wherever the corpse is, the vultures gather." Neat. What a wealth of warm fuzzies we seem to have here. Well I'm here to preach the Good News. So it looks like we are going to have to dig into this one.

This text comes from what's called the Olivet discourse in Matthew. There are similar passages in all the synoptic gospels warning Jesus' followers of the end times. Jesus uses apocalyptic language, and cites Daniel's apocalyptic vision to describe the signs that will lead up to the eschaton as well as how to be prepared for its arrival. Most scholars think the Gospel of Matthew was written around 80 C.E. to a group of Jews within a Gentile community. Some have argued that this prophecy referred to the destruction of the temple and

was posed as prophecy to describe the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E. Others say that since the Gospel speaks of such large and miraculous signs, none of which the readers would have experienced literally or metaphorically, this was a prophecy for what has yet to happen. Regardless, the passage indicates that soon after the tribulations Jesus described the Second Coming of Christ was imminent, and all should prepare.

Specifically, we who are readers are called to prepare for this time when we will see this desolating sacrilege. Jesus says, “When you see one standing in the holy place: run.” Run. Well, not just run. He tells us to get down from the roof, do not grab a jacket, do not be pregnant or breastfeeding. Hope to God it’s not snowing or a Saturday, since that would really slow you down. Do not believe anyone who tries to distract you with lies, flashy tricks or offers you candy or puppies! Do not pass GO, do not collect \$200 (I’m paraphrasing) and just keep on going. And if you do all that . . . then you should be fine. Fine? “Fine,” he says . . . yeah, as there’s lightning flashing across the sky reaching from east to west and I’ve got the desolating sacrilege hot on my heels?

And what is a desolating sacrilege anyway!?!

How am I supposed to run if I have no idea what a desolating sacrilege is? Is it a who or a what? Someone or something? Animal, vegetable, or mineral? If we break it down, it’s desolating, so it is someone or something that is causing something to be empty, miserable, or bleak. And it is sacrilegious: so someone or something

that is making something that once was sacred empty, miserable, or bleak.

Well, I would imagine that empty, miserable, and bleak perfectly described the outlook of the Jewish community to which Matthew was writing. Their temple, the ultimate sign of God's eternal presence with them, has been destroyed, and the land that was promised to them through a covenant with God has been taken away from them. They are left to reevaluate what it is to be Jewish without the temple in a foreign land. So they're low, they're down and out, and what does Jesus have to say to them: When you see the desolating sacrilege, run from it. Look out for that which takes something holy and makes it empty, miserable, and bleak. When you see it, do not stick around. When people call to you, telling you that the Lord is there, do not believe them.

Here Matthew's church is perhaps being told that while this may seem like the end, Christ is indeed coming for you. Do not linger in the miserable, do not get stuck there, but prepare and relish in the knowledge that you belong to God and God is coming for you. While things may be looking bleak now, God is not in the emptiness, but in the abundance of life.

Jesus is relying on what he has told them of the nature of God to serve as their compass. God is the source of living water, eternal life, and abundant love. Living, eternal, and abundant – these are the opposite of empty, miserable, and bleak. Through the revelation that has been illuminated in the Incarnate Christ, we are able to know who God is and who God is not.

Jesus says: do not be fooled by false messiahs and false prophets who will show you great signs and omens. They are liars filled with empty promises. That is not God. God is different. God is more. There will be lightning that fills the sky that ushers in the presence of God. It will be big. It will be scary, but when it is of God, and it brings the second coming of Christ, it is good, too.

So is Jesus speaking of a good day or a scary day?

Both I would imagine. It will be a joyous day for those who know who God is. It will be a very scary day for those who don't – for those who don't know what to do, where to go, or who to trust. That's what Jesus is warning against: being left unprepared. Jesus came to earth to reveal to us who God is so that we might be prepared!

It surely will be a good day when all of God's children are finally and completely united with God, when God calls us home and there is a new heaven and a new earth. It will be triumphant and victorious and abundant. It will be wholly good and terrifyingly unfathomable. That's kind of God's calling card, isn't it: when something is so big and so scary, but so good at the same time? Those who have followed a call know what that is – those here who have left behind other lives and other expectations to be here. If you ask any second/third/fourth career person, they know.

When we finally run from the desolating sacrilege – from the someone or something that makes the sacred feel empty and bleak, and when we finally admit to ourselves what isn't Christ, then we are following God. That is being prepared. Some people might say: He's up here! Come on over. This is fulfilling over here. It might be a

raise, or another job, or a drug, an unhealthy relationship, or even something we consider a ministry. Christ tells us here not to believe them, because he has taught us better. God reveals God's self to us through Christ. And **Christ teaches us who God is.**

We are to run for the hills away from that which makes us empty and that which distracts us from what is truly of God. And when we do that we are in true unity with God. If we live in Christ, we know that when Christ returns he is coming to get us so that we might live forever with God. So prepare for the coming of the Lord by living now with the assurance of the nature of God. Live in Christ and so know our God both today and in the end of days.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

¹ Herbert B. Workman, *The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal* (Boston: Beacon, 1962), 23.

² A Monk of New Clairvaux, *Don't You Belong to Me? A Basic Introduction to the Spiritual Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 93-94; quoting from John Cassian, Conference 10:10, in *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, vol. 11, pp. 406, 407; Owen Chadwick, tr. *Western Asceticism, Library of Christian Classics*, vol. 12 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), pp. 24-242. Italics added by A Monk of New Clairvaux. Bold added by the preacher to invite congregational response.

³ Notes on sermon preparation:

Text: Matthew 24: 15-28

Type: Expository

Style: Plain

Title: Run to God

Good News Statement: Christ teaches us who God is.

Message Statement: Prepare for the coming of the Lord by living with the assurance of the nature of God: terrifyingly unfathomable, but wholly good and wholly trustworthy.

RE-THINKING AFRICAN AMERICAN ECCLESIOLOGY

F. Douglas Powe, Jr.¹

I overheard two ladies talking at a church I was visiting. One lady complained, “folk do not come out like they used to for church.” The other lady agreed and added, “These younger generations do not care about the church.” The conversation ended when one lady stated, “I remember when everyone in this neighborhood came to this church.”¹

How many congregations share the sentiment, “I remember when everyone in this neighborhood came to this church.” What happened? When did it happen? Declining membership and vitality in most congregations did not happen overnight. This is especially true for many mainline African American congregations. Many of these once vital congregations are experiencing a similar decline to their Anglo mainline counterparts.² Like many congregations in the United States, these once vital churches are distraught and seek a solution. I do offer some ways forward, but in this essay my focus is laying out the challenges facing many mainline African American congregations.

Providing statistics on the decline of mainline African American congregations is difficult. Many denominations do not break

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out their statistics just for African American congregations and some of the mainline African American denominations do not report their numbers (see chart referred to in footnote 2). However, by extrapolation from the *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches 2011*, we do have some hard data.³ Additionally, there is ample anecdotal evidence. Given my position as the E. Stanley Jones Associate Professor of Evangelism and being an integral part of a mainline African American denomination, I have had many conversations about what is detailed in this essay. Without divulging identities I try to capture what has been reported to me concerning the challenges facing many African American congregations. Nadia Bolz-Weber captures the challenge I seek to describe when she suggests many individuals are not coming to mainline denominations because they have to “culturally commute” from who they really are.⁴ While she is talking about mainline congregations in general, I believe her observation sets the stage for understanding the struggle many mainline African American congregations face today.

For years African American churches were considered the heart of the community and many African American pastors had their hands on the pulse of the community. The Civil Rights Movement was a pivotal time for many African American congregations. The truth is many African American congregations were not focusing on evangelism during this time, but still experienced growth.⁵ Attendance and activism were at their peak for many of these congregations during the sixties and early seventies.⁶

While it is possible to name many reasons for the success of mainline African American churches growth during the Civil Rights Era, theologically it can be traced to how many African American congregations interpreted and lived out the *missio Dei*. By *missio Dei* I am referring to the various activities by which African American congregations bore witness through word and deed to the liberating reign of God.⁷ During the Civil Rights Era many mainline African American congregations preached, taught, marched, sat-in, etc., to bear witness to the liberating reign of God.

Most noticeably during the Civil Rights Era many African American congregations were perceived as a sanctuary from the harsh realities on the other side of its doors, the church house is where the people would gather to hear God's word before going out to enact God's word. There has never been a time when everyone in the African American community went to church, but the good news of the gospel was intended for the entire community. When reading or hearing stories about the Civil Rights Era one immediately notices that many congregations were places where African Americans experienced some form of empowerment.

A shift occurred during the seventies in many African American congregations as the nation transitioned away from the Civil Rights Era. This cultural shift altered the ways in which many African American congregations served as a sanctuary in the community, embodied the good news so that it was for still for all, and empowered a diverse African American community that often was further segmented between the haves and have-nots. It is impossible in this

essay to give a detailed account of how these three themes have altered African American ecclesiology in current times, but I will provide insights for readers on why re-thinking sanctuary, the embodiment of the good news, and empowerment are keys to black congregations more fully participating in the liberating reign of God.

Sanctuary

From its beginning the African American church has been a place of sanctuary. For many African Americans the church was the only space where they felt safe from the harsh realities of the outside world. The slaves would steal away to the brush arbor so that they could create a safe space to worship and testify. Throughout most of American history the church has been a sanctuary for those within the African American community. The sixties were no different.

One of the strengths of the African American church during the Civil Rights Era was its ability to balance the idea of sanctuary as a worship space with that of a safe haven away from one's enemies. Many churches were used as meeting houses with the understanding that they were still fundamentally places of worship.⁸ Those gathered had a sense of God's presence in their midst propelling them forward in the struggle for justice. Gayraud Wilmore argues individuals like Martin Luther King, Jr. were able to hold together the best of black Christianity and social justice so that the church once again becomes a focal point in the community.⁹ Although Wilmore does not name it as such, the perception of many black churches as sanctuaries where one could go physically and experience God's presence was central to an

understanding of black Christianity and social justice working in harmony.¹⁰

The idea of sanctuary develops consciously and unconsciously in many African American churches because people came expecting God to provide a salve for their hurts, but were often surprised in the way the Spirit moved in their midst. John Lewis recollects the significance of his home church in his memoir:

No piano. No organ. But there was music, music richer and fuller and sweeter than any I've ever heard since. I'm talking about pure singing, the sound of voices fueled by the spirit, people keeping rhythm with a beat they heard in their hearts, singing songs that came straight from their soul, with words they felt in every bone of their body. These people sang with no self-consciousness and no restraint. Young and old alike, all of whom lived the same hard life, toiling in the fields, struggling with poverty and doing their best to make the best of it, found joy and meaning in the midst of hardship and pain.¹¹

This experience was not unique to Lewis's congregation; it was shared by many African Americans around the country. The church was more than a building where social activities occurred, and it was more than a space filled with worshippers of God. Many African American churches were sanctuaries for communities living amid the reality of a broken society, but with the hope for a new day.

For many during the Civil Rights Era the assumption was that the church was a space where both the spiritual and the social world collapsed into one another. Lincoln and Mamiya support this claim by their research when they quote a minister as saying, "Ministry in a

black denomination was different...because of what the church means to the community as a center for black caring and social political nurture.”¹² An invitation to the black church was an invitation to become a part of a community believing a new society was possible.

African American Christians were clear that the new society coming into existence was not of their doing, but a result of God’s mission. James Cone argues that witnessing in word and deed means “participating in the historical liberation spearheaded by God.”¹³ Cone’s point is that African American congregations are called by God to live out the meaning of liberation for those who suffer.¹⁴ For Cone, to be black during the Civil Rights Era was to suffer.¹⁵ God sends the church, in particular the black church, to participate in bringing about the reign of God which has as its ultimate goal the true liberation of all individuals.¹⁶ Many African American congregations during the Civil Rights Era understood that if society was going to be transformed, then the African American church needed to be sent out as part of God’s mission and participate in the healing and restoration of American society toward what God intended.

King and others understood the tension between promoting their mission versus participating in the *missio Dei*. It is understandable how promoting one’s selfish interest can become the goal when dealing with systemic structures and seeking a new day where the reign of God would be manifest. It is impossible to claim King and others never succumbed to promoting their own interests,¹⁷ but we do know they embodied in words and deeds the mission of God (e.g., true liberation of all individuals) for African American

congregations. Wilmore comments about King, “The people instinctively understood what he was saying. They recognized in his sonorous words and symbolic actions something akin to what they had always believed, or wanted to believe, about Christianity.”¹⁸ African Americans perceived the church as a place where their dreams and deepest spiritual hungers melded together as they participated with God in moving toward a new day. I am suggesting that one of the dreams of those during the Civil Rights Era was the true liberation of all individuals and it was because many African American congregations were perceived as sanctuaries in the community that this dream flourished by creating a safe space for many African Americans to hear God’s calling so that they could be sent out to witness to it.

In this context, evangelism for the African American congregation is a part of the mission of God and not a selfish ministry of the church aimed simply at numerical growth. During the Civil Rights Era many African American congregations did not teach evangelism or have defined programs for evangelism because individuals were excited about sharing how the melding of their dreams and spirituality came together in the church. Many of these individuals perceived evangelism as inviting others to experience a sanctuary away from the brokenness of society and a call to live out God’s transforming love in society. Evangelism flourished during the Civil Rights Era not because of various programs, but because congregations embodied in word and deed what it meant to participate in God’s liberating mission.

In fact, many African American congregations were so effective in embodying what it meant to participate in God's mission that they eventually lost sight of the *missio Dei*! Many of these congregations experienced the changing of laws as God's reign coming to fruition in the United States. I believe it is the conflation in some instances of social change with the reign of God that blinded many African American congregations to the deeper meaning of the *missio Dei*. Lost was the deeper understanding of the African American church as a sanctuary where the melding of dreams and spirituality came together. The focus became seeking visible social gains in the community.¹⁹ This has direct implications for the current malaise among African American mainline congregations. Many of these congregations never moved out of the Civil Rights Generation and are still trapped in that decade trying to figure out why the people stopped attending.

The African American church did not see an immediate negative impact as a result of their contentment with social gains, but the inability of many mainline congregations to deepen their understanding of the *missio Dei* has led to various forms of decline over time.²⁰ Two forms of this decline are the lack of a post-civil rights generations connecting with mainline congregations and the perception that many African American congregations are no longer the epicenter of the community.²¹ As a result, the challenge many African American congregations face is defining the ideal of sanctuary for newer generations.²²

Robert Franklin suggests if you ask someone how the African American church has changed after King's death, we should not be surprised to hear, "Many people doubt that any changes have occurred in this most mature, bedrock institution of the black community."²³ Franklin argues that this statement is not fully reflective of what has happened over the past four decades because the church has been innovative in many ways. I agree that the African American church has been innovative in some ways; however, it has not been innovative in redefining itself as a sanctuary for the community. Many African American congregations continue to experience declining membership because they no longer create a space where a deeper understanding of the *missio Dei* is being embodied. These congregations no longer are participating in the mission of God because evangelism solely for the sake of institutional preservation is now their defining motive. For example, young hip hop artists like Talib Kweli no longer perceive the church as embodying liberation.²⁴ Kweli argues the church has capitulated to the status quo of society and lost sight of the liberating message of the gospel.²⁵ For Kweli, and other post civil-rights generation individuals the ability to reinterpret the meaning of God's mission and the role the African American church plays as a sanctuary within that mission has been lost because of the black church losing its way and mirroring society.

Certainly many African American churches still perceive themselves as the bedrock of the black community and the space where one encounters God's salvation so that it can be shared with others. Cultural shifts, however, are a reality for all African American

churches, and many congregations are still ignoring the need to develop new evangelistic practices. For example, Ralph Watkins captures the sentiment of many ministers in the post civil-rights generations when he writes, “As a young pastor, I was out of the loop, but hip-hop put me back in the loop and in touch with the culture of the working-class African American community I was trying to serve. I wasn’t the normal pastor in our denomination.”²⁶ His point is most of the pastors were still using Civil Rights assumptions to try and reach post civil-rights individuals. The assumptions were not those embedded in a deep understanding of the *missio Dei*, but of maintaining the church as an institution.

The congregations who are still working under this assumption in the post civil-rights era have not reinterpreted the current eschatological hope of the community and are still seeking to live out a sixties model of transformation. Those working with a faulty assumption often no longer understand the black church as a sanctuary where the *missio Dei* is being lived out. Watkins helps us understand this point when he describes having to go out and find many of the younger black males in the congregation after Tupac’s death.²⁷ They did not automatically perceive the church as that safe space where they could meld their dreams and spirituality. Many African American churches are declining because they are struggling to interpret how African American congregations can continue being a sanctuary for those struggling in the community.

When appropriately living out the *missio Dei*, Cone suggests, “The black church congregation is an eschatological community that

lives as if the end of time is already at hand.”²⁸ The church becomes a space where all individuals can experience the ultimate hope of liberation. The ability of many congregations during the Civil Rights Era to create a space where all individuals could live out the *missio Dei* has to be reclaimed. African American congregations cannot simply be social change agents. African American congregations must be spaces where it is safe regardless of your station in life to embody God’s calling.

Although several African American churches are still sanctuaries, some in the community no longer view the church as a sanctuary where a space is created to experience God as a salve from the brokenness in society. For some African American congregations this means developing a new awareness of what liberation means for the community. For others it is becoming conscious of the call to liberation for all individuals. The challenge for many African American congregations is re-examining how it embodies the meaning of sanctuary in the community.

I Am Blessed and Highly Favored

For many who are a part of an African American congregation the phrase, “I am blessed and highly favored,” is not uncommon. So much so that the Clark Sisters who are gospel singers have a popular song called, “Blessed and Highly Favored.”²⁹ If one listens closely to people using this phrase it is often implied and sometimes stated that God’s favor has resulted in some form of gain. While on the surface this does not seem problematic, a dangerous theology is implied in the

statement for the African American community. I have mine; it is up to you to get yours. Namely, it is about me. I believe what gets lost in theological translation is a holistic understanding of community and the importance of embodying the gospel. Congregations preaching and teaching this implied theology have picked up on a strand of black religiosity, but have failed to contextualize it within a larger framework. The idea of being blessed gets interpreted through an individualistic lens and not in relation to a holistic understanding of community.

During the Civil Rights Movement the idea of being blessed meant the community as a whole benefited and it was not about an individual's achievement. One of the most powerful images of the Civil Rights Movement is of congregations and/or marchers holding hands and singing "We Shall Overcome!" This song, adapted from Charles Tindley's gospel recording "We Will Overcome," was symbolic of the need for working together to achieve a new reality in society. Vincent Harding further explains the importance of community by suggesting,

we can understand that what is usually called the "civil rights movement" was only one element-albeit a crucial, necessary element-of what many persons considered a larger, deeper, historically grounded movement: the struggle-often led by black people-to transform America, its values, institutions, and people, toward a more perfect union.³⁰

The goal was not to overcome in order to exchange one oppressive hierarchy for another, rather the movement sought to overcome the systems creating oppressive hierarchies by moving

toward a transformed society that more closely resembled the reign of God. This was not an effort to align Jesus with personal material gain, but an effort to alter the very values undergirding American society towards a more holistic inclusion of all people.

Unfortunately, the success of the Civil Rights Movement in getting some laws passed and changing the culture of America has fed into this individualistic interpretation of the good news. Prior to and during the Civil Rights Movement it was not uncommon to enter most cities in America and experience the pronounced segregation practiced in a particular area. African Americans regardless of income lived in one area and Euro-Americans lived in another area. The passing of Civil Rights legislation changed the demographics of the country and caused splinters within the African American community based upon economics. A middle-class African American community was created that did not necessarily reside in the “black section” of town.

It is no longer a given that someone who is African American will live in proximity to their church. In fact, many African Americans drive into the city to attend church in a community that is unfamiliar to them. The church resides in the same community it did during the Civil Rights Era, but some of those attending live in more “upwardly mobile” neighborhoods. For some who have left the community where the church resides an implicit assumption is that to be blessed is to have the ability to move outside of the community where the church is located. Franklin highlights the problem this creates when he points out that many predominately African American communities have ceased to be places where real accountability is

occurring and have eroded into “corridors of lawlessness, violence, addiction, and self-hatred.”³¹ Most African Americans are familiar with the conditions Franklin is describing, but are not thinking deeply enough about the connection between being “blessed” enough to get out of that context and those who must stay in those conditions.

A shift occurred in the post-civil rights era that re-defined the meaning of blessing in individualistic language instead of as living out a more holistic understanding of good news for the entire community. The purpose of being blessed is now not understood as transforming the community where the church resides, but as helping individuals to move to a better situation. Franklin suggests:

As years passed and village leaders focused on the legal, political, and symbolic battles in the public square, few seemed to notice that something was awry within the African American village itself. Village leaders in the 1970’s, successors to Dr. King, rightly assumed that African Americans would continue to follow King’s exhortations to “struggle with dignity, unity and hopefulness.”³²

Franklin correctly highlights that few in the community noticed that something went awry because they assumed the community would be unified. The reality is that when an economic divide occurred within the African American community the good news for those left behind was not the same good news as for those who moved out. Prosperity preachers in the African American community highlight this difference by suggesting those who are blessed are granted economic favor by God.³³ The issue for many left behind in decaying communities is, “I am not highly favored by God because I cannot move out of this

situation.” Lost is a communal understanding of blessing in favor of a more individualistic one of being upwardly mobile.

In some instances the issue of blessing gets dramatized even more when the physical church building is moved to a new location. Those with the means move the church to reside in their upwardly mobile neighborhood. This signals the ultimate in individualism; an unwillingness by some to struggle with one’s brothers and sisters who have not been as fortunate. If the church no longer resides in a “blighted community,” then those attending can focus on attracting those just like them.

By moving the church out of its original community it creates a physical and spiritual disconnect with those still residing in the previous area. The gospel is me-focused and not we-focused. While the current members may never explicitly claim economics as the reason for relocating the church, such reasoning is certainly implied by the individualized blessing theology.

The practical ramification of churches being relocated or located outside of African American urban areas is that it becomes easier to separate one’s spirituality from one’s commitment to transforming societal structures. Franklin argues that some word-churches have fallen into this snare by developing “an imbalanced biblical hermeneutic that focuses on individual faithfulness at the expense of social justice.”³⁴ The church ceases to be a community agent and becomes a space for individualism to prosper. During the sixties many African American churches worked with an assumption that the black church was called to help members live moral lives that

translated into justice-oriented social activism. The resulting evangelistic practice was one that embodied word and deed in very visible forms.

Neither I nor Franklin is claiming that African American congregations have to be in urban areas. Moreover, I am not seeking to criticize African Americans who no longer reside in the urban core or whose congregation is not in the urban core. Rather, my goal in making these observations is to illustrate a theological dichotomy within African American ecclesiology that needs attention.

During slavery African Americans were told that God had no interest in their physical condition because this was a prefatory state until heaven. God was not interested in transforming the physical condition of the slaves because when the slaves died they would be moving to a better place. The evangelistic focus was not on sharing the entire gospel of Jesus, which would entail deconstructing and reconstructing oppressive structures, but only sharing that part of the good news that centered on one's soul. Today African American congregations buying into a theology of "I am blessed and you are not" have replaced the old slavery gospel with a newer version. This newer version still focuses on God blessing some at the expense of others and omits the entirety of the good news by refusing to share Jesus's deconstructing and reconstructing message for systemic structures. Only a part of the good news is being shared; the part that focuses on one's ability to be blessed in some economic fashion which allows one to leave the blighted location.³⁵

Because of the evangelistic assumption that the good news is about moving out of the area and not transforming the community, certain evangelistic practices are developed that are perceived as sales pitches. For example, a high percentage of the congregation drives into the community once a week and out again after a few hours, but expects the community to embrace their sincere outreach.³⁶ Many African American congregations struggle to connect with those who have fallen on hard times because the current parishioners are disconnected from the realities facing those in the community.³⁷ The invitation to come worship with or join a particular congregation is perceived by many in the community not as an interest in their well being, but as notice that if you become like the evangelists it is possible to move out of this condition. Very little thought or effort is put into embodying the good news in such a way that the community can be transformed.

Second, the good news of the gospel no longer integrates personal and corporate morality. The ability to synthesize personal and corporate morality, especially when envisioning a better future, was a strength during the Civil Rights Era for many African American congregations. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream Speech" is replete with personal and corporate references for how to move forward in developing a new moral structure. One of the points of the speech was that everyone could participate in the coming reign of God by re-examining and altering their personal understanding of how we live out love of God and neighbor. If we are serious about re-

examining and altering our personal understanding of morality, then it will propel us through the Holy Spirit to develop new corporate values.

The failure to synthesize personal and corporate morality leads to a dualism that emphasizes one or the other. At the one extreme are congregations trying to control every aspect of one's personal life through a list of do's and don'ts. The focus of these congregations is adhering to certain biblical standards while de-emphasizing any social activism. At the other extreme are congregations focusing only on corporate morality and ignoring the importance of personal holiness. These congregations are often in the forefront in protesting societal ills, but de-emphasize the spiritual development of their members. Neither extreme is helpful in terms of evangelism.

The good news of the gospel requires us to avoid moving to one extreme or the other because these extreme positions present the gospel in an inauthentic manner that moves away from the *missio Dei*. African American Christian evangelism at its best is inviting individuals into a community that is seeking the liberation of all individuals. This means living holistic lives that are attentive to creating a healthy synthesis and not buying into the extremes of individualism or social activism. One of the strengths of many African American congregations during the Civil Rights Era was helping parishioners to live missional lives that were attentive to developing personal and corporate practices that embodied loving God and neighbor. The ability to synthesize personal and corporate morality created a dynamic flow that changed the world outside which in turn changed the world of individuals.³⁸ Because the flow between

personal and corporate change was dynamic it engendered evangelistic opportunities in the community.

After the Civil Rights Era, particularly with the rise of prosperity churches, the good news often is no longer about one's role within a communal structure because the focus is on how one's behavior translates into being blessed by God. Similarly, the good news is often not about re-examining corporate values that benefit the entire community because communal affiliation is often defined by classism. The good news for suburban African Americans is not necessarily good news for urban blacks. Watkins describes the challenge of classism in this way for those struggling, "This is what Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five call the jungle. It is a part of the city where the middle class and upper class have abandoned their brother and sisters who are locked in a cycle of poverty that has produced a permanent underclass."³⁹ African American congregations holding on to a belief that they are blessed and others are not have capitulated to reinforcing cultural norms that foster division and not wholeness.

This division is real and apparent when individuals drive in from the suburbs and see decay all around them, but when asked how they are doing by the greeters at the church—respond, "I am blessed and highly favored!" Explicit is the assumption that God has given me favor, but implicit is the assumption that God has forgotten those in the community. Many African American congregations face an evangelistic challenge in closing the split between individualistic renderings of the good news and more holistic understandings of the

good news. The real question is, “Can I be blessed and highly favored if my sisters and brothers are not?”

Spiritual Aspirations

The language of spiritual aspirations is an oxymoron for many congregations. Some congregations perceive spirituality not in terms of becoming more Christ centered, but as becoming more like that congregation. Theologically these congregations are pigeonholing the Holy Spirit in a way that suggests God can only move in a particular manner. The Spirit can only move if someone shouts in a certain way or prays in a certain manner. The Spirit cannot move if someone has studied Augustine, Sojourner Truth, David Walker or Maria Stewart.⁴⁰ The Spirit can only move if you look like our congregation and dress like us. The Spirit cannot move if you are different from us. Congregations often develop faulty assumptions and practices related to the movement of the Spirit. In these congregations the result is often a divide of us versus them. The “them” is defined as those who do not have the Spirit like us.

During the Civil Rights Movement King was able to bring together those entrenched in separate spiritual camps. King was well educated, but perceived by many to be guided by the Holy Spirit. King, Maya Angelou and others embodied what it meant to be spiritual in a way that did not negate the personhood of those without similar credentials. Spirituality is not based upon the way one understands God, but focuses on opening one’s self to be transformed by God.

During the Post-Civil Rights Era the idea of being spiritual has started to deteriorate and parishioners have ended up entrenched in extremes. Spirituality has become interpreted through a performative lens and not as a discipline for living one's life. Individuals who express themselves differently than those in the know are labeled as spirit(less). I am using spirit(less) to denote how I have heard congregations refer to someone who is not "our type of a Christian."⁴¹ Congregations start setting standards for what it means spiritually to become a member of that particular community. These spiritual standards have nothing to do with the Spirit empowering lives toward living into the reign of God, but are focused on non-essentials of the faith that are more divisive than unifying. For example, the rapper DMX would be perceived by many as someone who does not have the right spirit. His music, especially the unedited version, is not "appropriate gospel music." Watkins counters this claim suggesting, "the rap music of DMX is spiritual, cathartic, redemptive and religious."⁴² Watkins's point is that just because DMX does not use language that fits preconceived notions of what is spiritual does not mean he is spirit(less).

These extremes get played out evangelistically in two divisive ways that are hurting many congregations today. First, some congregations have started pre-determining if a person is right for their congregation. This determination often is based upon class, dress and other non-essential intangibles, having nothing to do with a desire to be in relationship with God.⁴³ The issue of dress is an important one today in African American communities because of hip hop styles that

have pants sagging. While I am not supporting the style of sagging pants, I want to emphasize that it is critical to differentiate between what one wears and pre-determining one's character or degree of spirit. Watkins suggests, "The civil rights generation fought to open doors and break down barriers to ensure the next generations' success. When the civil rights generation sees pants hanging down, hears speakers bumping in cars, and notices girls with thongs rising out of the back of their pants, they look in disgust."⁴⁴

Although it is not everyone in the Civil Rights generation that Watkins references has these feelings, his point is that many look in disgust because the attire of the youth seems contradictory to the goals of the Civil rights generation. Although this is a common sight in our culture today, many individuals within the African American and European American communities still profile these youth as spirit(less) and without culture. A connection is made between the character of these youth and their attire. For many African American parishioners, the idea that someone does not perceive this attire as unsuitable is unimaginable. A line is drawn between those upholding tradition and those pushing against that tradition. The problem is the line is drawn in such a way that those pushing against the tradition are not participating in church.

When congregations start drawing hard and fast lines based upon perceptions to keep others on the outside, it diminishes an understanding of moving towards the liberation of all individuals. Given the reality of mainline African American congregational decline, particularly the inability of these congregations to attract post

civil-rights generations, portraying individuals as spirit(less) makes no sense. The message being sent to those outside of the church is that they are not welcome. This means these individuals are finding spirituality in other places, including music, relationships or other communities.⁴⁵ The church is not the only option for people, so for a congregation to believe spirituality is only possible within the church is a bad assumption.

Second, some congregations develop an understanding of spirituality that presupposes those inside the church know what is best for outsiders. Those outside of the congregation have nothing to teach those inside the church. This “us versus them” mentality often gets embedded in various ministries and becomes another way to distinguish between the haves and the have-nots. Spirituality is redefined under the guise of classism based upon the ability of those inside to ration out material goods to outsiders. For example, some congregations that participate in clothing closets, food pantries or other outreach ministries are sending a message through their attitudes and, in some cases, their words, to those they are helping that they are in their situation because their lives are not right.⁴⁶ Relying on the individualized theology of blessing, such congregations make the point that if those in need were like them they would not need these ministries.

Spirituality becomes divisive and not empowering under these circumstances. As a result, efforts at evangelism are often undercut because the manner in which the deed is done sends a message to those outside of the congregation, “You are welcome to come and get

what you need (because we have it), but you are not one of us.” This attitude creates barriers with those not fitting the current mold of the congregation that furthers congregational egocentrism. This egocentrism often takes the form of creating classist divisions for those wishing to become involved in the congregation.

The assumption by these congregations is that they have the goods and that their less fortunate counterparts need what they have. Not only are the material items being used as a commodity to attract individuals to the church, but spirituality is being commoditized in a way that negates moving toward unity. The work of the Spirit is redefined from that of empowering all toward something new, to clearly demarcating those inside and outside of the community. Congregations get frustrated when these outreach ministries do not result in changed lives and start to blame those outside of the church. These congregations should be looking in the mirror because they are promoting a method for doing outreach that plays into an “us versus them” model. This form of evangelism is doomed to fail because it disenfranchises some at the expense of others.

African American congregations that are promoting an “us versus them” mentality need to re-think the meaning of spirituality. I have tried to illustrate that it is not helpful for congregations to think of spirituality in terms of either/or solutions that value some in the congregation at the expense of others. Specifically, congregations buying into the notion that they are better than those in need because they have greater wealth are alienating many of those who need the gospel. African American congregations need to embody a spirituality

that points toward the Trinitarian God transforming lives and communities. Jason Vickers is helpful in unpacking this when he differentiates between material goods and dispositions.⁴⁷ His claim is that we have to open ourselves to being concerned about having the right disposition (i.e., humility, joy, repentance, etc.) and not worry about what someone wears.⁴⁸ We have to come with the right attitude and be open to the Spirit moving in a variety of ways and not in one particular manner.

The idea of being spiritual should not be an oxymoron in African American congregations, entailing closeness with God but a rejection of one's poor neighbors. African American congregations must move beyond divisions that create dichotomies in classifying people. They must especially start practicing evangelism differently. The focus should no longer be on pre-determining who is spiritual or on making someone conform to a pattern of spirituality. Instead, it should be on helping all people to be filled with the Spirit. To be Spirit-filled would mean that a person is open to the transforming power of God in his or her life and within the community.

A Missional Challenge

Many African American congregations face a missional challenge today in not fully living out what it means to participate in the liberation of all individuals. These congregations are limiting their understanding of sanctuary by not creating a safe space that connects with the Post-Civil Rights generations. These congregations are defining the good news in such a way that it mirrors the materialism

and individualism in secular society. And these congregations are struggling to embody a spirituality that is open to God's transformation for the individual and community.

The reason many mainline African American congregations find themselves in this situation is that they have ignored the cultural and generational shifts within the community. Trying to reclaim and recapture the glory days of the Civil Rights Era is creating diminishing returns for these congregations. This is not a critique on the Civil Rights Era, but an observation that these congregations are not embodying the hopes of those who fought for freedom during that time by refusing to meet the current challenges of the culture.

Evangelistically, this current situation provides an opportunity for some African American congregations to envision new possibilities for their congregations in the following ways:

First, articulating a new vision of sanctuary that moves beyond the physical location of the church building. The physical space of the church building was important during the Civil Rights Era, but for Post-Civil Rights generations we need to expand our understanding of space. Space is not only physical, but mental.⁴⁹ The Post-Civil Rights generations have to feel like they are a part of the conversation and not simply window dressing waiting for their turn.⁵⁰ This means creating a safe space where dialogues about God can occur. It is reclaiming the church as a sanctuary for the entire community. If the Post-Civil Rights generations do not feel like they are in safe conversations, then they will (some have) shut out those claiming to have good news.

Second, more African American Christians have to articulate a holistic understanding of the gospel. Megachurches and prosperity ministries are easy targets, but all congregations are responsible for not simply reducing the gospel to what is in it for them. For African American congregations to speak a prophetic word to the community, the community has to see something different from the rest of the culture embodied in those congregations. A holistic understanding of the gospel further means focusing our attention on our neighbors in a way that they believe we are all in this together. This is particularly challenging given the migration patterns of some middle class African Americans.

Third, congregations need to open themselves to the movement of the Holy Spirit. This will allow different expressions of the Spirit and help to move congregations away from “us vs. them” mentalities. When the Spirit is perceived as empowering all of us and not just some of us, it will radically change the way these congregations do ministry in the community. More basically, it will radically change the way they interact with those in the community.

These three ideas are not exhaustive or outlined in great detail. My hope is that I have helped us to imagine new possibilities for how African American congregations can rethink evangelism. It is time for African American congregations to take up the missional challenge of participating in the liberation of all by getting out of their comfort zones. The days of “build it and they will come” are gone. African American congregations are called to be prophetic in new ways as they live out the mission of God.

¹ This conversation is representative of many that I have heard over the past ten years.

² We can see reports of decline in the Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches 2011, [http://www.nccusa.org/yearbook/\(accessed 3.16.11\)](http://www.nccusa.org/yearbook/(accessed%203.16.11)). Almost all mainline denominations are declining and this decline is magnified for mainline African American congregations, which tend to be in urban areas.

³ See footnote 2.

⁴ Nadia Bolz-Weber, Keynote address at the Urban Academy in Denver Co., January 28, 2012.

⁵ Anthony B. Pinn, *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 18.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Jason E. Vickers, *Minding The Good Ground: A Theology for Church Renewal* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011), 53.

⁸ Pinn, 17-18.

⁹ Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983), 174/r.

¹⁰ Lincoln and Mamiya develop from a sociological perspective the ways in which social justice and the black church are connected. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990).

¹¹ John Lewis with Michael D'Orso, *Walking With the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 35.

¹² Lincoln and Mamiya, 170.

¹³ James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1986, 1990, 2010), 138.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 5.

¹⁶ Ibid., 7.

¹⁷ One example of this is in the documentary, Henry Hampton and Julian Bond. *Eyes on the Prize. Two Societies, 1965-1968 : America's Civil Rights Movement Vol. 4, The Time Has Come, 1964-1966*. [Alexandria, Va.]: PBS Video, 2006. When King leaves Chicago he agrees to stop all of the marches, but Robert Lucas and other activists decided to continue the march. King called Lucas shortly before the march to ask him to call it off. This action can be interpreted as self-interest given his agreement with Daly.

¹⁸ Wilmore, 177.

¹⁹ I am not suggesting that social gains are not important, but claiming when African American congregations operate with a deeper understanding of the *missio Dei* social gains are not the end toward which society is ultimately being transformed.

²⁰ In a conversation with Candace Lewis (December 10, 2011) who is a part of the new church start team for the United Methodist Church, she indicated the growing number of African American congregations closing and how alarming this is for the future.

²¹ F. Douglas Powe, Jr., *New Wine, New Wineskins: How African American Congregations Can Reach new Generations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), Xiii.

²² Ibid., 29-30.

²³ Robert M. Franklin, *Another Day's Journey: Black Churches Confronting the American Crisis* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 53.

²⁴ Ralph Basui Watkins, *hip-hop redemption: finding God in the rhythm and the rhyme* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 104.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 6.

²⁷ Ibid., 7.

²⁸ James Cone, "Sanctification and Liberation in the Black Religious Tradition," in *Sanctification & Liberation*, ed., Theodore Runyon (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), 175.

²⁹ http://www.music-lyrics-gospel.com/gospel_music_lyrics/blessed_and_highly_favored_13509.asp (accessed 1.26.12).

³⁰ Vincent Harding, "We The People: The Struggle Continues." in *The Eyes on the Prize Civil Rights Reader: Documents, Speeches, and Firsthand Accounts from the Black Freedom Struggle*. eds., Clayborne Carson et. al., (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 233.

³¹ Robert Franklin, *Crisis in the Village: Restoring Hope in African American Communities* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 18.

³² Ibid., 17.

³³ Josef Sorrett discusses this in his blog "Kanye West's Critique of Prosperity Gospel," on Religious Dispatches, July 10, 2010.

³⁴ Franklin, *Another Day's Journey*, 72.

³⁵ Pinn, 28.

³⁶ I have personally worked with many African American congregations who have embodied this thinking. I will not name the congregations to protect their identities, but want to highlight this reality.

³⁷ I am not suggesting that those in the congregation are not aware of some of the systemic things in the community, but this awareness is very different from this being one's lived reality.

³⁸ Vincent Harding, "We The People," 232.

³⁹ Watkins, *hip hop redemption*, 48.

⁴⁰ Pinn, 24-25.

⁴¹ I have on many occasions heard comments like, "those people are not spirit filled like us." I am taking these comments to define what it means to be spiritless.

⁴² Watkins, *hip-hop redemption*, 88.

⁴³ I did a workshop for African American pastors in Cleveland (May 2009) and one of the issues was the non-acceptance by some members of those dressed in church attire. The pastors talked about a general attitude of "those folk" need to learn how to dress before coming to church. While this is a small sampling of congregations, I do believe this attitude is more pervasive than just Cleveland. The Watkins quote (footnote 44) also speaks to this issue.

⁴⁴ Ralph C. Watkins, *The Gospel Remix: Reaching The Hip Hop Generation* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2007), 12.

⁴⁵ Powe, *New Wine*, 46.

⁴⁶ I have witnessed and talked with individuals frustrated with food pantries, clothing closets, etc., because of an attitude by some that those giving out the material things are better. A superior complex develops that because we are able to do this we are better than those coming to receive.

⁴⁷ Vickers, *Minding*, 61.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Powe, *New Wine*, 46.

⁵⁰ Post civil-rights generations are the Integrationists and the Hip-Hop. For a more detailed description of post civil-rights generations see *New Wine, New Wineskins*.

EMERGING MISSIONAL MOVEMENTS: AN OVERVIEW AND ASSESSMENT

Rick Richardson¹

Introduction

“Missional” has become a new code word and basis for a claim to the moral high ground in the theology and praxis of contemporary ecclesiology. But what does it mean to be genuinely missional, to have the *missio Dei*, or mission of God, as core to the identity of the Church? Are there varieties of missional church today, and, if so, what are their distinctives? Is the missional shift in the ecclesiology conversation a harbinger of a missional shift in structures and practices, especially in relation to the Church in the West, or is it just another conversation that helps sell books and makes a new group of leaders and writers prominent while leaving little lasting change in its wake? In this article, building on my article last year in *Witness*,¹ I will suggest a fuller typology of missional church, and raise the critical issues that must be addressed for these emerging missional streams to endure and have a lasting impact.

So what does it mean to be missional? In his recent book on trends in missional church Craig Van Gelder suggests four theological distinctives that mark missional churches (I have added the comments that are not italicized):²

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1. *God is a missionary God who sends the church into the world.*

This sending is rooted in the sending by the Father of the Son and the sending by the Father and the Son of the Spirit. This action of God takes place within the very being of the Trinity. This sending energy or force is part of God's identity. The Church is the people of God indwelt by the presence of God, and so this sending DNA is constitutive of the identity of the Church. The church should not be seen as having a missions program or component. Instead, God's mission has a Church. The Church in its core identity is simultaneously sent and sending.

2. *God's mission in the world is related to the reign (kingdom) of God.*

This reign encompasses all that God has planned since the beginning for extending his rule through human beings to the entire earth, begun in Genesis 1, challenged in Genesis 3 and 11 with the declaration of human autonomy from God's rule, pursued by God through the election of Abraham and Israel, penultimately inaugurated through Jesus' death and resurrection and the gift of the Spirit, and fulfilled in his return and in a city in which nature and culture are blended and completed and filled with the presence and glory of God.

3. *The missional church is an incarnational (versus attractional) ministry sent to engage a postmodern, post-Christendom, globalized context.* The missional church is not just a Western Church either. In its many global and glocal expressions, the Church engages her context incarnationally and contextually.

4. *The internal life of the missional church focuses on every believer living as a disciple engaging in mission.* The church is not only the gathered church, but is the also the scattered church, infiltrating every sphere of society and every geographical and economic location in a community.

Missional churches challenge the secular, individualistic, consumer oriented, therapeutic-style, business-imitating, market-driven, building-obsessed church of the West by modeling an alternative kingdom-community oriented toward service and mission and the incarnational extension of Jesus' ministry, values, and presence into the world! This contrasts with the attractional church of the West, which tends to think of people as customers and consumers, reinforcing the pervasive practice of church shopping, and turning pastors into commodities paid to provide the religious goods, services and experiences that congregants consume! No wonder church leaders are burned out and exhausted, and one might even say, consumed and digested.

The Emerging Missional Movements: A Taxonomy

The missional impulses have led to a new generation of torch bearers for missional theology and practice. The most recent expressions, and the groups that I think will dominate attention in the first couple decades of the new millennium, include at least five streams, the first four of which are identified by Tom Sine in his book *The New Conspirators*:³

- The Missional Stream
- The eMerging Stream
- The Multi-ethnic Stream
- The neo-Monastic Stream
- The Multiplying Stream

The Missional Stream. Influenced by the writings of Lesslie Newbigin⁴⁻⁶ a group of Christian scholars founded the Gospel and Our Culture Network and began calling for a missional and prophetic engagement with Western culture. Their books, *The Church Between Gospel and Culture*⁷ and especially *The Missional Church*⁸ have stimulated missionally oriented renewal in many mainline churches, and their leaders include Darrell Guder (Princeton), George Hunsberger (Western Seminary), Lois Barrett (Eastern Mennonite), Craig Van Gelder (Luther Seminary) and Alan Roxburgh (Allelon).

This missional stream has now influenced the other streams in the typology in an increasingly profound way, though the influence has not always been direct. Seeking to trace this influence, Van Gelder suggested a typology of missional streams in his book *The Missional Church in Perspective*. He based his typology on the way each group imagined the work of God's presence in and through the Church. Specifically tracking the extent to which different groups saw God's agency as operative and discernible within human choices, he created a spectrum depending on whether people start with the mission of God or the mission of the church. He also considered how these different groups engage their theological imagination, by asking how

each group understands God's presence in the world, in general, and in the midst of the church, in particular?²

Several of the people Van Gelder described do not agree fully with his characterizations of them (e.g. Alan Hirsch, from a personal conversation). To rectify this, I would suggest a simpler criterion. Generally, different traditions are adapting missional church ideas to their own traditions, creating a new synthesis that both reinforces their traditions and also expands it in somewhat new directions. The more the traditions lean toward the conservative and evangelical perspectives, the more their missional emphases are on evangelism. The more the traditions lean toward the mainline and liberal the perspectives, the more their emphases are on justice and the betterment of society. Some of the positions on the spectrum include:

1. While conservative Evangelicals emphasize attractional strategies for evangelism, they are becoming more focused on how to extend evangelism through their members into the world as a result of the missional conversation. Nevertheless their focus remains firmly on the priority of evangelism in the mission of God.
2. Church growth Evangelicals integrate their emphasis on church growth with an emphasis on every member being a missionary and every social and geographical location being a mission field. These groups, influenced by Aussies Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost, are also doing more to come to terms with the increasing social marginalization and political pressures the church is facing. They go beyond conservative evangelicals by

emphasizing wholistic ministry and impact, but they still maintain a very strong priority on church growth as the most important result.

3. Mainline groups tend to emphasize the compassion, relief and justice parts of the mission, rooted in a theology of the kingdom of God that can include a strong focus on social activism. These traditions are being influenced toward more intentional witness in the world through the missional conversation.
4. Academic leaders press the theological agenda of developing an adequate theology of the Trinity and of the *missio Dei* as the root of any and every particular expression of missional ecclesiology and practice in the world. These leaders also emphasize God's agency as primary and have worked to develop this idea in richly theological directions. As the primary initiators of the missional conversation, they have needed to respond to the questions of the practitioners with models and principles of practice in order be heard more broadly.

The eMerging Stream. Since the early 1990s, a group first of young British and now increasingly U.S. and Australian leaders have engaged postmodern culture. They are relational and experiential, involved in the arts, are more into narrative theology than propositional theology, and are focused on local and incarnational expressions of mission. Leaders include Brian McLaren,⁹ Tony

Jones,¹⁰ Dan Kimball,¹¹ and Spencer Burke (www.theooze.com). There is also a more Reformed and less theologically radical stream of emerging churches that is a case by itself and needs another paper to tell its story adequately and assess its importance. This stream is especially represented by Mark Driscoll¹², who was initially part of the Emergent group of leaders and who helped launch all things emergent into prominence. Driscoll's Mars Hill Church in Seattle and Acts 29 national network of churches is an expression of this neo-Reformed sub-tributary.

The emerging church has fragmented into three fairly distinct streams¹³:

1. Relevants who are theologically conservative but culturally innovative and liberal. Dan Kimball and Mark Driscoll would tend to embrace this stance.
2. Reconstructists who are seeking not just to redefine strategy but are seeking to redefine ecclesiology, often emphasizing the church as alternative community in a more Anabaptist direction or the church as a community being restored to its Biblical roots as illustrated in Acts. Darrel Guder and George Hunsberger have championed the more Anabaptist direction, and Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch have championed combining missional incarnational ideas with attractional church growth ideas, emphasizing restoring the church to its roots as pictured in Acts. These two leaders have been connected to the emerging

conversation but also bridged well with the larger missional conversation as discussed above.

3. Revisionists who are rethinking the basic theology of the church using more postmodern, socially constructionist epistemologies and with greater awareness of issues of social location and social power. Brian McLaren and Tony Jones would tend to champion this approach. This revisionist stream has been the most commonly criticized by conservative evangelicals in the literature. The critique acknowledges that they are asking important fundamental questions, but are also drifting away from primary Protestant and evangelical understandings of atonement, the cross and the authority of Scripture.

The Multi-ethnic Stream. There are a growing number of multi-ethnic, urban-oriented churches that are embracing a gospel based on the theology of the kingdom, and that see evangelism, justice, and reconciliation as core to the gospel. Leaders include John Perkins¹⁴ and Wayne Gordon (Community Christian Development Association), Efrem Smith and Phil Jackson,¹⁵ Erwin McManus,¹⁶ Brenda Salter McNeil¹⁷ and David Gibbons.¹⁸

There are two smaller streams (my designations) within this larger stream that together make up the larger stream and that can overlap somewhat depending on the specific example.

1. The Community and Leadership Development Churches that focus on developing leaders from within the

community who contribute toward the spiritual, economic, social, and physical growth and wellbeing of the community/neighborhood. They pursue activities as diverse as preaching the gospel, growing the church, rehabbing and selling homes, starting businesses, launching health clubs and health clinics, and running drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers. John Perkins, Wayne Gordon, and recently deceased Glen Kehrein are and have been key leaders in this stream.

2. The multi-racial Churches that focus on issues of racial reconciliation are another expression. These churches tend to be made up of young urban professionals and are often located in urban settings near universities and businesses. These churches also tend to locate physically where they can have some community development ministry and can easily attract diversity. Their focus tends to remain on the diversity issues. The congregations usually remain mostly educated and middle class and are often ethnically predominately Asian American and white American, though some of these churches remain more focused on the African American/Anglo divide in society. David Anderson,¹⁹ Mark DeYmaz²⁰ and David Gibbons are key leaders in this tributary.

The neo-Monastic Stream. This stream is more diverse in age and ethnicity than the other streams, though it is presently being fueled

by the growing interest of young people in global justice issues. For instance, Scott Bessenecker's book *The New Friars*²¹ deals with the rapidly increasing youth movement toward more radical and communal involvement with the poor, such as among the communities connected to the Cairo garbage dumps. These groups take their inspiration from past monastic movements and are forming communities that adopt a rule of life and often live among the poor. Leaders include Shane Claiborne,²² John Hayes,²³ and Pete Greig.²⁴

The main distinction between different expressions in this stream revolves around when they were founded.

1. Several communities were founded in the 1950s as part of a post World War II rethinking of the relation between Christ and culture, including the Labri community founded in 1955 and Reba Place Fellowship founded in 1957.
2. Many communities were founded around the time of the Jesus movement in the 60s and early 70s. Most of these communities no longer exist, but the Jesus People and the Word of God community are two examples of communities that live by a rule of life, share possessions in common and seek to engage in the neighborhoods around them. They have survived and at points even thrived. They tended to suffer from skepticism toward older leaders and earlier movements.
3. Newer communities, especially those connected with the 2004 meeting in Durham, North Carolina where an agreed upon rule of life entitled the "Twelve Marks" for new

monastic communities was written. These communities are not tied to any particular model of sharing possessions and purses, but are more driven by the desire to create various forms of community and more significant engagement with compassion ministry. Simple Way and Rutba House are two examples. These communities have tended to be far more open to older leaders and earlier movements.

The Multiplying Stream. This stream has much continuity with the seeker church and purpose driven movements, though many in this stream define themselves in opposition to their “parents.” More than the seeker movements, the multiplying stream has focused on multiplying congregations through reproducing leaders. While many of these groups theologically demonstrate more continuity with traditional Evangelical theology, they are being influenced by postmodern culture in their understandings of leadership, team, and the connective power of the Internet for communicating ideas and distributing resources. For instance, New Life Church in Chicago gathers its many site preachers weekly to prepare Sunday messages in community. Also, although some of these groups are trying to grow mega-churches through video-casting their services (such as Lifechurch.tv in Oklahoma City), many are emphasizing that small is better by emphasizing the multiplication of churches rather than attracting people to a single church. Leaders include Craig Groeschell (Lifechurch.tv), Mark Driscoll (Mars Hill, Seattle), and Dave Ferguson (Community Christian Church in Naperville, IL). These multiplying

movements are the least and latest to be connected to the missional conversation, but Alan Hirsch, Michael Frost and several others are becoming important influences in bringing a missional theology, vision and agenda to these multiplying movements. For instance, the last Exponential Conference, shaped by many leaders of the largest multi-site churches with 3800 church planters in attendance, focused entirely on becoming missional. It also featured several of the most influential voices in the missional church conversation. Three tributaries flow into this last major stream:

1. Church Planters form the largest number of leaders, with church planting emphases and church planting resources and conferences increasing in numbers and impact for many denominations and groups. Many of these leaders are being influenced toward becoming missional through the largest church planter conferences, like Exponential and Verge.
2. Multi-site leaders are an influential group within this larger stream because they have developed a model and methods for growing their churches through the multiplication of sites and leaders without running into some of the barriers to building larger mega-churches, like buildings and the need for very complex management and funding structures. Younger leaders embrace these multi-site models since they provide oversight, mentoring and resources for planting new works. In other words, they provide a context

of church planting “with the training wheels on,” as some younger planters like to say.

3. Movement leaders are embracing a vision of exponential growth through the reproducing not just of churches but of networks of churches through the leadership of “apostolic” people. These people cast a compelling vision for these networks, attract younger leaders, are gifted church planters themselves, and communicate well. Neil Cole²⁵ and Dave Ferguson are just two examples.

Challenges

What are the key commitments that leaders in missional circles will need to pursue if they are to endure beyond the current conversation? (The emerging church conversation is a good example of a recent conversation that sold many books and spun off many conferences affirming all things emergent. It then turned on itself and sold many books criticizing all things emergent before it began to dissolve into numerous fragments.) How will these missional streams endure and contribute to a reformation of the Church in the West and a strengthening of the global Church?

I want to recommend five syntheses for the leaders of the missional streams. These syntheses bridge historic evangelical emphases with contemporary missional church emphases. If missional leaders from the various streams seek these syntheses, I would suggest that they have a possibility of being an enduring and transforming expression of God’s Church and of God’s mission.

My methodology in this section will be to compare and contrast 20th century Evangelical attitudes and convictions with contemporary missional attitudes and convictions. The contrast helps bring clarity to the discussion. But even more important, many of the emerging missional stream founders and leaders are in reaction to the reductionism and cultural captivity of a background in Evangelical churches, denominations and parachurch movements. This reactionary stance is especially clear in the emerging revisionist leaders (see *Deep Church* by Jim Belcher²⁶), but is more generally true of people with an Evangelical background in all the missional streams. At present these leaders with an Evangelical background are providing a disproportionate level of influence throughout the missional conversation.

1. Evangelicals in the past century overemphasized verbal proclamation and underemphasized deeds of love and signs of God's presence and power. Nineteenth century evangelicals, in contrast, wed the words and deeds (though not necessarily signs of God's power) well. Moreover, beginning with the influence especially of Latin American evangelicals Samuel Escobar and Rene Padilla at Lausanne in 1974, evangelicals more generally have been gradually recovering this integration, at least of word and deed, if not sign. Contemporary missional leaders, sometimes in response to their evangelical past, tend to overemphasize acts of compassion and mercy and underemphasize boldly challenging people to enter the kingdom and trust and follow Jesus. Only the multiplying stream avoids this tendency, and even in the multiplying stream, there has been a jettisoning of the word

evangelism so as to escape its historical baggage. We need to get beyond the “evangelism/social action” (or alternatively put, “word/deed”) dichotomy that was so rooted in Enlightenment polarities (i.e. spiritual/ material, secular/sacred, private/public), embracing an integral holism in which the church lives her faith and shares her life instead of living her life and sharing her faith as some separate and dichotomized activity. Mother Theresa, with her prayer to be given “souls” (of the dying) and “saints” (of the serving) as she cradled the dying in her arms resonates with this generation more than Billy Graham. Missional churches and leaders that proclaim the gospel of the kingdom of God in word, deed and sign toward the transformation of whole people in their whole social context will have far more cachet with this emerging generation of younger leaders than evangelistic groups that make strong distinctions between “saving souls”, “healing bodies” and “redeeming communities.” More importantly, more wholistic groups will also be more Biblically balanced and therefore more enduring! Even the language about “saving souls” carries within it the very dichotomy we are trying to overcome. Yet the tendency among many missional movements is to lose the vibrancy and vigor of evangelism.

2. Evangelicals in the past century, and missional movements in the present century, tend to pursue and embrace a monolithic view toward whatever is the dominant culture, an approach to culture that was especially modeled by H. Richard Niebuhr in his influential work on Christ and culture. Evangelicals tended in the past century to embrace modernism with its rationalistic and empirical

orientation, seeking to prove the existence of God and develop logical and propositional formulations of the gospel, defenses of the faith, and systems of theological belief that were put forward as being as authoritative as the Scriptures. Conversely, some contemporary missional leaders, possibly some of the missional stream thinkers like Hauerwas, probably many of the emergent revisionist thinkers like Brian McLaren, Doug Pagitt, and Tony Jones, can embrace a philosophical postmodernism that dissolves truth into experience, word into imagination, and conversion into community. In addition, the multiplying stream leaders can pursue a pragmatism that is far more reflective of the kind of philosophical perspectives articulated by Richard Rorty than many of those leaders might realize or intend. My primary point here is that many contemporary missional leaders must become far more reflective and discerning about the culture in which they minister and the degree to which that culture has coopted their paradigms and practices.

Since the publication of *Christ and Culture* by H. Richard Niebuhr in 1951,²⁷ conversations about culture in many religious contexts tend to emphasize a monolithic response to larger cultural environments, rather than a discerning and case by case response to specific cultural trends and practices. We need to get beyond the Niebuhrian choice of a monolithic orientation toward cultures, including modern, postmodern and post Christendom cultures, and instead embrace a more nuanced and integrated vision for how Christ and cultures interpenetrate and how the church must discern and pursue gestures toward specific dimensions of particular cultures

rather than monolithic postures toward culture in general.²⁸ The missional stream leaders like Guder, Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder have understood this necessity, but many of the other missional streams have not at all adequately addressed the issue of relating to cultures in nuanced ways.

3. 20th century Evangelicals tended to claim an epistemological certainty about their objectivity and grasp of the truth, even about minute theological and subcultural distinctives and details. This claim to certainty has often been a basis for splitting churches and movements. But no person has a God's eye view of reality or of the Scriptures. On the other hand, some missional and emerging leaders can tend to embrace a theological and ethical relativism and thoroughgoing perspectivalism that undermines any passionate conviction about even the most basic truths of the gospel (e.g., that God's kingdom has been decisively inaugurated, that Jesus died for the forgiveness of sins, that he was raised bodily for new life, and that Scripture is an authoritative word for all times and all peoples in all cultures). Again, emerging revisionists tend to embrace this more relativistic theological and ethical approach. But many of the missional movements, including some reconstructionists and some neo-Monastics, tend to underemphasize propositional kinds of truth and overemphasize ethical obedience to Jesus as the primary critical mark of faithfulness to the gospel.

We need to get beyond the conservative/liberal dichotomy around epistemology that has so pervaded the Church in the West over the last century. George Lindbeck characterized this dichotomy as the

contrast between the cognitive propositional approach of the conservatives and the experiential expressivist approach of the liberals in his influential *The Nature of Doctrine*²⁹. Instead we with humility recognize the particularity of the cultural linguistic worlds in which we live and interpret and understand truth, but we also embrace a confidence in the canon to guide our interaction with our tradition and shape our communication of truth in the world so that our word is not just true for us alone, but is truly a word for that world.

4. 20th century Evangelicals emphasized Jesus's birth, death and resurrection, drawing on the Pauline epistles for their interpretation, and minimized their focus on Jesus's life and teachings and ethics in the formation of their theology. Conversely, missional church leaders today tend to emphasize Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom, his ethical teachings and his missional lifestyle, sometimes minimizing their emphasis on Jesus' death and resurrection and the Pauline and historic theological interpretation of those events, again sometimes in reaction to their conservative past. We need to get beyond the Pauline/synoptic gospel dichotomy that is so prevalent in the emerging church debates, embracing an overarching eschatological framework that integrates the Christ of Paul with the Jesus of the synoptics. Emerging missional movements have wondered how the proclaimer (Jesus) became the proclaimed, and how a person (again Jesus) became so many propositions! They want to recover his fresh and radical commitment to forging a community in which he restored God's rule to the blind and lame and poor and least and lost. They wonder how a church that proclaims Jesus and his death and

resurrection seems to look so little like Jesus in her life and ethic, and in her forms of mission. The doctrinal language about Jesus has become for many younger leaders dead language because it hasn't seemed to result often in lives lived like Jesus. But as we recover the ethics and mission of Jesus, we need to stay rooted in the profound theological and eschatological reflections on the meaning of Jesus's death and resurrection that especially Paul explored for us.

What's more, the differences have been overdrawn. Paul and Jesus lived in very similar ways, with the result that Paul's proclamation about Jesus was never severed at all from his call to live like Jesus, counting others better than himself, looking to their interests, reaching the least and the lost everywhere. And Jesus's proclamation of the kingdom always looked forward to his death and resurrection to ransom the world and to inaugurate the life and powers of the age to come. Both Jesus and Paul preached a radical gospel of the rule of God, inaugurated in Jesus, carried on by the Holy Spirit, and fulfilled in the return of Christ. This eschatological lens helps us integrate Paul and Jesus, story and proposition, word and life. We need to have a healthy theological integration of soteriology and eschatology. We need to work out our salvation based on the eschatological work that God has uniquely accomplished in Christ's life, death, and resurrection and the gift of the Spirit, all end times events that have inaugurated into the middle of history God's anticipated rule over all of history.

5. Evangelicals, influenced by church growth thinking in recent decades, have emphasized attractional ministries based on

substantial resources, paid clergy, and access to buildings and land. In contrast, missional leaders tend to emphasize incarnational forms of ministry, no professional clergy, and the church scattered rather than gathered. Here I think missional leaders are providing a way forward for all of us. We do need to get beyond Christendom forms and patterns of church with their emphasis on buildings, political influence, resource control, cultural imposition, Western leadership styles, and Western expertise. In place of these we must seek to become a movement of exponential growth driven by local apostolic leaders filled by the Holy Spirit.

For instance, mission leaders in every generation need to come to terms with their own inevitable obsolescence, the necessity of generating lower cost models of mission that put power in the hands of local leaders sooner rather than later, and foster multiplying movements of cells and churches under the direction ultimately of the Holy Spirit. These models will not just emphasize the scattered church, but will also suggest new forms for the gathered church which are not dependent on the West or on immense resources and elaborate buildings. In addition, we need some mission leaders to embrace the accelerating marginalization of the Western church in Western society to show a new future in which the West will operate without all the economic and political power it has previously held. We need to become less supportive of institutional constructs of power and more adept at prophetic engagement. That is a lesson from the neo-Monastic movement, which is drawing the attention of so many young people today and modeling Biblical forms of alternative community

that can survive and thrive in situations in which the church finds herself marginalized.

As emerging missional streams and leaders pursue these emphases, instead of living in the inherited dichotomies set up by our modernist past and our over reactions to that past, these streams and leaders have the opportunity to collaborate with God in renewing our evangelistic witness and missional impact in our day. As we pursue an integral wholism of word, deed and sign, nuance our response to cultures with which we're engaged, combine epistemological humility with canonical confidence, adopt an eschatological (kingdom) lens in our soteriology, and embrace more missional and modest models of church structure, resources, and power, the potential for a new Reformation of the church in which the ministry of the gospel is truly carried forward by all the people of God becomes ever more imaginable. These newer missional streams can provide a profound and constructive influence in church and culture for a generation to come in a globalizing world in desperate need of this Reformation. May God make it so, and may this article, offered as an attempt at critical but affirming conversation, contribute to our future together.

ENDNOTES

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OR: Cascade Books, 2011. 210 pages.

Reviewed by James David Gunn

In John's Gospel, we are told that Jesus did many other things than what was written . . . or even could be written . . . in just one book. But John chose to include what he did for the expressed purpose "that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:31) With the same kind of intentionality and for much the same purpose, Richard Stoll Armstrong set out to tell a story in *A Sense of Being Called*, which is a story of how God called him—a baseball executive—to ordained ministry as a pastor, and how God provided for him and his family through that journey.

Written for a specific audience, Richard Armstrong directs his story towards "his boys" or the people whom he knew through his front office days with the Baltimore Orioles organization. But he also hopes that other readers, while they may never desire to pick up a theological textbook, will be willing to pick up *this* narrative, if for no other reason than the common ground they may share with the author: a love for baseball. Wanting even those who are not yet Christians to read his book, Armstrong concedes to the reader that what he sees as God's providential care will be dismissed by others as mere coincidence, and what he says about God's call will be interpreted by skeptics as just another unverifiable experience that cannot prove the existence of God.

The author should be commended for his stated purpose, for he places before us an example of how all of us should keep the hearer in mind when providing a witness to the grace of God. And because God works uniquely in each of us, we may have the opportunity to speak with unique success amongst certain kinds of people. This is the book's strength: it's a story of an ordinary person, who found himself in a unique situation, who responded to God's call, and seeks . . . as we all should . . . to bear witness to God.

Some parts of the book, however, are more effective than others in meeting the author's aim, and even baseball fans will wonder whether the book shouldn't have been titled *Memoirs of a Presbyterian Pastor*. Presbyterians will certainly be right at home with the language used and the references that are made in the book, and pastors of all stripes will likely find that many of the challenges and adventures described by Armstrong resonate with their own journey through seminary and to congregational ministry. Unfortunately for most other readers, the details provided by the author are irrelevant for the intention of hearing about the grace of God. Additionally, the background information given by the author at different points of the story does not always make for a smooth timeline that is easily followed. Even though it is not the most well-crafted narrative, the authentic way in which Armstrong describes the amazing intervention of God in his life, makes for a powerful message that can certainly encourage the reader.

Following the author's example of wanting a testimony of God's grace to be heard, it is fitting to consider who in our lives could

be benefit from Armstrong's story. Sports fans, and especially that of baseball, will naturally be more interested in Richard's story, and that interest will only increase with the age of the reader. If you or someone you know grew up idolizing the likes of Mickey Mantle and Yogi Berra, then the names and background stories from that era will be as welcomed and honored as a seventh-inning stretch. But there is yet another potential target audience, and that is of parents who have suffered through the death of a young child. His son "Ricky" suffered from leukemia, and this time, the many details given by the author build upon one another in such a way as to move the heart of any parent and anyone familiar with loss.

The usefulness of the book goes beyond how it might be lent to that non-Christian, baseball-loving neighbor down the street. It can also be read for the gentle reminder to all of us of the significant power of a testimony, and it just may encourage us to consider the unique witness we can have and for us to tell our story of God's grace and mercy.

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Budde, Michael L. and Karen Scott, Eds. *Witness of the Body: The Past, Present, and Future of Christian Martyrdom*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011. 238 pages.

Reviewed by Matthew Wright

“[M]artyrdom is missiological.”

So argues Tripp York in one of the many instructive essays in this volume that aims to return “martyrdom to a more central place in the self-understanding of the church, a move with perhaps audacious implications” (vii). These implications include evangelism, and engagement with this book will bear fruit for teachers, pastors, and other Christians concerned with mission and evangelism.

York’s essay explores how martyrdom in the early church became “the archetypal act of Christian witness” (23). Martyrdom is “a public bodily confession that hopes to transform all that is not of Christ into the mystical body of Christ. It is an act that seeks the good of the city, though not as the city might imagine” (24). When the early Christians died happy in an arena designed to terrify and reinforce imperial power, York argues, those watching were confronted with an alternative view of the world. The narrative (as we might call it today) was challenged, and many abandoned the old reality and converted. In this way, martyrdom was less a reaction *against* the empire than a witness *to* it. “Martyrdom, like all other forms of Christian witness, is not merely an end in itself, since it has a particular reason for being: the conversion of all that is not Christian” (34). The essay challenges us to consider how the church today might witness to empire rather than merely react against it.

Emmanuel M. Katongole's, "'Threatened with Resurrection': Martyrdom and Reconciliation in the World Church" lifts up the lives and deaths of Christian martyrs as "the most concrete, dynamic, and exemplary case of the journey of reconciliation" (191). In remembering the stories of the martyrs, the church draws attention to what it means to be a sign of hope and an agent of God's new creation in a broken world. If William Abraham is right that we should construe evangelism as primary initiation into the kingdom of God, then Katongole's call to the church to better remember and retell the stories of martyrs must be heeded by those who practice and teach evangelism. For the lives and deaths of martyrs provide not just extreme examples of what it means to be a Christian, but represent a journey of reconciliation to which all who have been baptized are invited. Such a framing of martyrdom invites reflection not only on approaches to evangelism but on its content as well.

The book is organized on largely chronological lines, and features chapters from historians, political scientists, and theologians from different traditions. Some of the essays in this volume may lie beyond the interest of those called to teach and practice evangelism in today's church. In addition, the lack of an index may hamper those interested especially in the peripheral or implicit topic of evangelism. However, *Witness of the Body* provides a valuable opportunity for exploration of aspects of missiology and evangelism that might otherwise escape contemporary teachers and pastors.

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Chilcote, Paul, ed. *Making Disciples in a World Parish: Global Perspectives on Mission and Evangelism*. Eugene, Or: Pickwick Publications, 2011. 327 pages.

Two Reviews

Reviewed by Laura R. Levens

With twenty-eight contributors from around the world, Paul Chilcote's volume achieves the difficult task of bringing global voices together on the important topic of discipleship as it relates to Christian mission and evangelism. Taken together, the essays within this book offer a lively conversation on disciple-making as the primary mission of the church today. The essays also offer a challenge to any who assume making disciples consists of finding the right universal method without any attention to local context, local needs, and the gifts of local communities of faith. The diversity of voices and sustained attention to particular context makes *Making Disciples in a World Parish* both global and local in its scope.

Concerned with The United Methodist Church's struggle to embrace its identity as a global community in the twenty-first century, Chilcote sought contributions from teachers and practitioners of the Wesleyan tradition. The book is divided into six sections, five of which are major geographic regions: Africa, Asia & Oceania, Europe, Latin America & Caribbean, and North America. The last section offers contributions from authors who have engaged in cross-cultural witness as immigrants or overseas teachers and missionaries. The authors were asked to frame their reflections around questions concerning the practice of making disciples in their contexts: critical

challenges to disciple-making, influential Biblical images and stories, vision and practice of evangelism and disciple-making, signs of new life and vitality resulting from these practices, and lessons they could contribute to the rest of the world parish. Authors chose their own approach for answering any or all of these questions.

Whether in Africa where evangelism and growth abound, or in Europe and North America where church membership and religious influence is in decline, all authors agree that connecting disciple-making with evangelism is of utmost importance. Nahashon Gitonga, who has served in pastoral and academic roles in Kenya, argues that the lack of emphasis on Christian nurture in Kenyan evangelical revivals led to “still-born Christians” with a lack of moral integrity and continued ethnic conflict (30). For Gitonga, Christian nurture through enculturation leads to mature and responsible disciples who are committed to love of God and ethnic neighbor with special sensitivity to the needs of Kenyans (36). In Estonia, teacher and practitioner Kaja Rüütel is equally committed to high standards for church membership in the face of secular, post-Soviet culture. Though only four percent of Estonians attend church weekly, signs of new life are found in Methodist churches who understand discipleship as a communal practice and conversion as “a process that takes more time and involves a true reorientation of one’s life” (142-43).

The emphasis on making disciples *in one’s own context* is a true strength of Chilcote’s volume. Each essay offers a glimpse of Christianity in different cultural contexts around the world, and authors offer wisdom while acknowledging the limitations of their

context to answer the needs of others. However, one should not assume each essay is concerned with one unique, stable, isolated culture. On the contrary, many authors are highly aware of shifting cultural patterns in the twenty-first century, and express their concerns about cross-cultural evangelism, cultural dislocation, and multi-cultural contexts. Biblical texts such as the Jerusalem Council in Acts, stories of Israel in the wilderness, Jesus' encounters with the Syro-Phoenician and Samaritan women, and psalms extolling harmony among God's people have become newly influential to these authors in their contexts. Likewise, communal reading of Scripture, communal prayer, connectional relationships, and engagement with social concerns become indispensable practices for inculturated and globally connected disciple-making in a changing world.

This volume is a must-read for those in the Wesleyan tradition. I also recommend this book to churches and Christian communities interested in global Christianity and wanting to learn more about discipleship. The format of multiple short essays tends toward breadth rather than deep, sustained engagement with a particular context or issue. For those interested in more research and discussion, Chilcote offers lengthy lists for further reading at the end of each section. This volume could also be helpful for undergraduate or seminary courses looking for theological reflections to supplement and even challenge more academically inclined works on discipleship, evangelism, and Christian mission.

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Paul Chilcote's eminently readable volume promises to serve well a broad range of reading audiences. Missionaries, evangelists, pastors, professors, seminarians, and lay Christians excited about living and sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ, all stand to mine rich nuggets from this work. The editor's introduction does a fine job of mapping the territory and orienting the reader to the expansive terrain about to be traversed. Essentially the book invites the reader to listen to the voices of Christians around the world as they reflect on what it means - and what it takes - to live as missional Methodist believers and congregations in their geographical contexts. Their stories and conclusions offer rich ethnographic insights as the reader takes a trans-oceanic tour: "riding the flood tide in Africa; navigating the cross currents of Asia and Oceania; persevering through the ebb tide of Europe; tacking into the Latin American and Caribbean winds; and exploring the new ocean in North America" (5).

The list of contributors indicates diversity of gender, profession, geographic location, belief and practice. This marshaling of such varied voices is part of the book's uniqueness and effectiveness; each chapter opens another window on the world of Methodism and Christian mission. Additionally, the contributors were invited to submit their own bibliographies, indicating the influences that have made the strongest impression on their thought and practice. Chilcote offers an edited version of the combined bibliographies at the end of each section of his volume, which augments the book's value

and purpose; the reader now has the opportunity to consult with an extended set of voices.

The editor's method for achieving coherence despite the extensive range of authorship, involves posing five questions, which each contributor is meant to address. The questions focus on the most critical challenges related to disciple-making in each locale; images and/or stories from scripture that frame or orient the author's missional activities; the particular vision and practice of evangelism in each context; signs of new life and vitality in the life of the church as a result of this vision and practice; and - of great significance for the North American readership - what lessons may the rest of the world parish learn from the missional activity in each context. Answers to these questions serve as helpful guideposts on this expansive journey; they give the reader (traveller) a way to connect the dots between continents.

Some readers may find the lack of a specific definition of mission problematic. Chilcote does not offer one; the concept, on a global scale, is too complex to be tied into a definitive package of words. It also does not translate as easily as one would think - the variety of effective missional practice and thought illustrated in the book bears this out. Besides, there are other readers who may find it more helpful or even fascinating to engage a kaleidoscopic view of mission as presented by the twenty eight contributors.

At the end of this book I felt enlarged and challenged. I was enlarged by the testimony of sisters and brothers, many of whom seem to be as high on effectiveness as they are low on resources. I was

challenged by fellow-Christians who are quite comfortable in their “minority identity,” even as they faithfully witness to the power of the gospel in their contexts. Altogether *Making Disciples* is a valuable contribution to the disciplines of missiology and evangelism. Its global perspective, its diverse voices, and its practical witness are a tribute to its Wesleyan orientation.

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Hirsch, Alan and Lance Ford. *Right Here Right Now: Everyday Mission for Everyday People*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011.

Reviewed by Matt Elofson

As I encounter approximately 150 new undergraduate students every semester from various denominational backgrounds, I am repeatedly faced with the reality that very few clearly grasp the scope of God’s calling on their lives as Christians. I am convinced that most of them are deeply committed to their theological beliefs and sincerely desire to encounter God’s presence in their lives. However, many of them struggle to comprehend the relevance of their relationship with God for the manner in which they live out their daily routines or participate in the professions for which they are preparing. The diverse theological and denominational backgrounds from which these students come attest to the likelihood that this difficulty is not limited to just them, but is indicative of a struggle being experienced by countless numbers of people in Christian communities throughout

North America. In *Right Here Right Now: Everyday Mission for Everyday People*, Alan Hirsch and Lance Ford address this dilemma by articulating a theological rationale for a missional Christianity that ultimately has implications for the manner in which one daily lives.

Hirsch and Ford approached the task of co-authoring this book in a unique and engaging fashion. Following the introduction, Hirsch bookends Ford's writing of the majority of the text by providing a general "framework" for a missional metamorphosis of the readers' thinking and action regarding their faith. In between, Ford separates his writing into three distinct sections that expound upon the missional nature of the Christian life. The first provides the theological rationale for Christians to adopt a missional paradigm. In the second, he identifies and critically explores various cultural values and practices that are deeply embedded in the American psyche that oftentimes hinder one's desire and ability to live missionally. He thoughtfully assesses the compatibility of these with values characteristic of God's kingdom and proposes various practical suggestions by which the reader can counteract their influence. Ford's final section identifies a number of practical ways that he believes Christians in America can begin to live more missionally. Along with composing the "Briefing" and "Debriefing" chapters, Hirsch regularly interjects concise yet insightful comments regarding the topics Ford considers in order to compel the reader to think more deeply about them. Their writing structure and style makes the work both readable and insightful, which hopefully will lead to it being more widely read because of the significance of its content.

While there is much to be applauded in this work, the parameters of this review only provide the opportunity to highlight a few of the more prominent ones. First, Ford's willingness to confront various values, ideologies, and practices often regarded highly amongst many members of the evangelical community is refreshingly honest. By critically engaging such issues as the use of our economic resources, our housing choices, and our prioritization of the nuclear family, he prudently challenges readers to contemplate how their everyday perceptions and practices have been thoroughly shaped by contemporary American culture. Beyond just offering a convincing critique, Ford proposes a number of practices that Christians could intentionally integrate into their lives that have the capacity to counteract these circumstances.

In addition to the strength of Ford's insightful cultural engagement, both authors demonstrate a keen awareness of a number of theological themes that often tend to be undervalued, but have great consequence for the manner in which Christians daily live out their faith. For example, Ford addresses the inherent value of every human being by using the cinematic metaphor of "extras" in a film. He suggests that many Christians go through life as if they were the "star" of a movie that rarely pays any attention to those individuals existing on the periphery of their existence. As a result of the presence of the *imago Dei* in every human being and Jesus' intentional "beholding" of others, Ford calls us to be attentive to the people we encounter and the leading of the Holy Spirit as to how God might use us in their lives.

In conclusion, Hirsch and Ford have penned a timely volume for the Shapevine Missional Series that compels their readers to contemplate the relevance of their Christian faith for the manner in which they daily engage a context that is experiencing rapid ecclesial and global change. In doing so, they have effectively sounded a clarion call for all Christians to adopt a missional Christianity that has profound implications for “right here right now” that is theologically informed, yet comprehensible for a broad audience.

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Merritt, Carol Howard. *Reframing Hope: Vital Ministry in a New Generation*. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2010, 147 pages.

Reviewed by Kwasi Kena

Hope, in Carol Howard Merritt’s estimation, needs to move from obscurity to primetime. Merritt believes Christians have long exalted the virtues of love and faith while treating hope as the oft neglected, middle child in the Apostle Paul’s trio of virtues. “And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.” (1 Corinthians 13:13 NRSV)

For Merritt, the need to reframe hope is personal. Candidly, she writes about never living in the church-centered world familiar to so many modern-era Christians. She experienced a wounded Christianity known for its sex scandals and conservative politics. She listened to Christopher Hitchens’s lament “religion poisons everything”

(Hitchens, *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, 2007).

Merritt's experience with Christianity is representative of a new generation that has serious doubts about the Christian faith many follow with unquestioned loyalty. For disillusioned youth and young adults and frustrated modern-era Christians, *Reframed Hope* can be the bellwether that explains our present discouragement and suggests today's frustrations are preparation for heartening things ahead.

To understand the flow of this book, one must understand two things about Merritt. First, she is a blogger-turned-author. Indeed, her book reads like a stream of blog entries loosely held together by an overarching theme. She muses. She observes. She sprinkles the pages with anecdotes and reflections. Do not expect her to drill down too deeply or provide extensive analysis of the pros and cons of a position. Merritt writes in the fast-moving, subject-jumping fashion so prevalent in cyberspace. With this in mind, readers can appreciate her offering of reframed possibilities presented and join in the "what if" musings about how to do vital ministry in a new generation.

The second thing we must know is that Merritt is a "loyal radical," that is a postmodern pastor who expresses a both-and position, grounded in the best of the church's past tradition yet acutely aware of ways contemporary culture moves into the future.

The book title *Reframing Hope* implies an inherent benefit in looking at things anew: new ways of doing, conceptualizing and practicing the Christian faith. Merritt urges readers, especially those comfortable in modern-era congregations, to view the ever-changing

tide of culture, society, and the church through new hope-filled lenses. If engaged in faithfully, the act of reframing may inspire congregations to explore use of different media for meaning-making and faith formation; such as social networking, digital communication, and social justice. Technology provides the church opportunities to express Christian faith through creative ministry *in community* rather than through private acts designed for pietistic individualism.

For the uninitiated, *Reframing Hope* serves as a helpful primer, ushering neophytes through a survey of the virtues of communicating via Internet resources: Facebook, Twitter, and the blogosphere. Merritt devotes more than half of the book's content to the virtues of technology. She presents it as a treasure trove, full of new ministry possibilities: networking in cyberspace vs. physical meetings, worship through downloads and digital devotions. Each opportunity offers new potential for people to get or stay connected with altruistic efforts and Christian community—regardless of geographical location.

For readers unfamiliar with the Internet and the “younger generation” Merritt's musings will be prophetic. For example, her observations that digital communication can mobilize the masses to participate in major causes have become commonplace.

Merritt offers several recurring themes worth noting. First, the postmodern generation thinks communally, is weary of the practice of individualistic Christianity, and wants to network. Second, this generation is technologically savvy and creates community in cyberspace. Third, because of technology's reach, this generation is more aware of injustices worldwide and uses technology as a tool for

activism.

The question for contemporary churches to grapple with is how to move from traditional notions of ministry operations (meeting physically and church activities being tied to the building) to contemporary methods (blogging and social networking). Merritt urges churches to update the traditional media congregations use to connect with, visit, and reach out to people.

Merritt hits her stride near the end of the book when she speaks about things the older generation can do to engage post moderns: mentor, share power, listen and avoid the “we’ve already tried that” position.

The book’s greatest contribution is the constant invitation to update church methodology and praxis while remaining rooted in the best of church tradition.

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Rankin, Stephen W. *Aiming at Maturity: The Goal of the Christian Life* Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011. 188 pages.

Reviewed by W. Stephen Gunter

This book transcends the typical fare with phrases like ‘spiritual maturity’ in their title. The reader will find little platitudinous piety among the pages, and Rankin gets to the point early by asserting that, even though these are important for Christian believers, things like (1) formal theological knowledge, (2) extensive

Bible knowledge, (3) adherence to rules of conduct, and (4) regular participation in religious activities, do not constitute spiritual maturity. Rankin takes care to point out that Biblical and theological knowledge does not equate to Biblical wisdom, and keeping rules while attending church regularly does not guarantee Christian character. Rankin is also honest with his reader by pointing out some assumptions that undergird where he intends to take the reader:

1. His case will be grounded in Scripture as a guide into spiritual truth.
2. His theological assumptions are grounded in the Wesleyan tradition.
3. He takes into account recent work in cognitive psychology.
4. His intended audience is people in the parish and persons ministering in the local church.

It is not as simple as it sounds when he asserts: Spiritual maturity is the goal, Jesus is the way and Christlikeness is the desired result. This requires some working assumptions in the formal topic of Christology, and Rankin gets at this without engaging in highly technical language. He actually manages a readable discussion of Christ's two natures (pp. 18-19), and concludes: "Salvation from this angle includes not just being freed from the penalty of sin, but also being delivered from its power, so that we can live like Jesus." He then gives this assertion practical depth when he adds: "A spiritually mature believer demonstrates the disposition, words and actions of Jesus himself" (p. 21). Rankin relates these insights to the most difficult conversion of all, the "conversion of the pocketbook." He relates being at two fundraisers in succession where people at his first event could give \$16,400 per person and basically never miss it. Then at the

second fundraiser, Latino/Latina children had gathered 16,400 pennies. One is reminded of the parable of the widow's mite. Spiritual maturity is a matter of the 'mind.' But the Biblical notion of 'mind' is not like, "I changed my mind." It is about attitude and inclination of character that shapes our desires and dreams and ambitions (p. 27). So spiritual maturity is about both the mind and the heart, and in Biblical theology the 'heart' is about the center of our integrated wholeness. Augustine got it quite right, "You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless till it rests in you" (p. 34). Until we, lost creatures that were made originally in the spiritual and moral likeness of God, find our way by grace back into an integrated wholeness in which our heart finds its rest in the creator, we will not be at peace. And we will not be spiritually mature either. Thank you Steve Rankin for a very practical book that reminds us of this great truth.

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Root, Jerry and Stan Guthrie. *The Sacrament of Evangelism*
Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2011. 286 pages.

Reviewed by Paul W. Chilcote

An obscure Carmelite monk, Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, published simple reflections on *The Practice of the Presence of God* in the 17th century, and this guide became a devotional classic almost immediately. Root and Guthrie take up a similar theme in this new work on evangelism, placing the issue of the

presence of God in the forefront of their thinking about this practice. The central theme throughout the work—something both welcome and profound—is the simple fact that evangelism has to do with uncovering the presence of a God who is already present in the life of the world. In a prayer of my own tradition drawn from the Service of Morning Prayer, the faithful proclaim that God is at work for good in the world all day long. In essence, Root and Guthrie advocate discovering that “presence” and finding ways to partner more effectively with God in God’s work already begun.

They unpack this conviction in four movements: preliminaries, abiding in Christ, the gospel and humanity, and content and follow-up. Each of these parts of the volume consists of five chapters with conventional titles such as “The Great Commission,” “Communication,” and “Reproducing Reproducers,” as well as more innovative themes like “Mirroring the Presence of Christ in the World” and “Longing: Ascetic/Saint.” Defining “sacrament” in a very rudimentary way as a place where God is present (pp. 15-16), the authors explore this presence in its many facets, punctuating their insights with personal stories often drawn from their own experience. One of the more compelling sections of the volume (Part 3, Chapters 12-14) employs the paradigm of “longing,” drawn from the renowned work of the Oxford mystic, Evelyn Underhill. In her classic study of *Mysticism*, she identified three cravings of the human spirit that only mystic truth, in her view, could satisfy, namely, the pilgrim, lover, and ascetic longings. Some of the authors’ more unique insights engage these themes.

Despite the many positive qualities of this new resource, serious deficiencies detract from its potential impact on a community larger than the evangelical world out of which it comes, and presumably, for which it is written. First, the authors' definition of "sacrament" is too broad and amorphous, and their employment of this theme reveals little familiarity with the vast literature on evangelism and the sacraments within other traditions. The authors make no effort to draw any of these vital connections into the conversation. What would it mean, for example, for faithful disciples of Jesus to be shaped by the four-fold action of the Eucharist: taking, blessing, breaking, and giving? Every time the community of faith celebrates the Sacrament, they proclaim the good news of God's love for all people in Christ. How does this shape people and communities into gospel-bearers in the world? The volume is really about "personal evangelism and the presence of God."

Secondly, this work perpetuates an individualistic, personal salvation paradigm of evangelism without due attention to ecclesiology and partnership in the *missio Dei*. Virtually all of the illustrative stories in this volume deal with the way in which the Spirit works through the evangelist (an individual) to enable someone to give his or her heart to Jesus. Many "come to Christ" through such means, of course, praise God, but this is only one aspect of the much larger missional practice of evangelism. The authors show very little familiarity with the vast body of literature from the past quarter century that paints a much larger portrait of evangelistic practice

related to its ecclesial, missional, and eschatological (i.e., related to the inbreaking of and participation in the reign of God) framework.

A chapter on “Target Practice,” illustrates both of these concerns dramatically. “We must also consider the gun,” the authors write, “which is the life of the person who delivers the message (the bullet) to the audience (the target)” (pp. 50-51). What an unfortunate metaphor, antithetical to the gospel-bearing paradigm of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus we are called to emulate as his disciples? Despite this and other infelicities, two features of the volume, in particular, have redeeming value. First, the emphasis on God’s presence that goes before because God is already there. In my own tradition, we call this prevenient grace. Second, an emphasis on God’s love as the source, means, and goal of all evangelistic practice.

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Thiessen, Elmer John. *The Ethics of Evangelism: A Philosophical Defense of Proselytizing and Persuasion*. Intervarsity Press, 2011. 285 pages.

Reviewed by Jack Jackson

Having recently strolled through Christopher Hitchens’ *Hitch 22*, I approached Elmer John Thiessen’s appropriately titled work, with a mixture of excitement and dread. I feared this would be a failed attempt to justify a central Christian activity to a world that largely no longer cares about the Church or its mission. I am pleased to say that my fears were, for the most part, alleviated. Thiessen’s work falls

short in a few areas, but on the whole it provides a helpful response to those who seek to diminish, if not ban, religious proselytizing and persuasion.

The purpose of Thiessen's work is to provide a philosophical basis for ethical religious proselytism and the persuasion he believes is intrinsic to it. Though he identifies as a Christian, his work is clearly an assertion that any missionary faith, specifically Christianity and Islam, can and should proselytize in ethical ways. While these two historic faiths provide numerous examples of unethical proselytism, an ethical model is available, he argues, and the criterion for this model is Thiessen's ultimate goal. Indeed the primary contribution of his book is, in my mind, the fifteen criteria for ethical proselytism he offers in the latter third of the book.

A number of these fifteen criteria, such as Physical coercion, Psychological coercion, Caring for people in body and soul, Truthfulness, Motivation, Results (making numbers the point of proselytism instead of people), and the Golden Rule (would the proselytizer want to be treated this way), are not particularly unique to Thiessen. But two criteria do seem a bit unique. First is his description of the Rationality criterion. Ethical proselytism always entails, in his mind, rational discourse and reflection. This reflection may never be entirely complete for it always involves a step of faith in the Christian tradition, but it never completely sidesteps human reason. This criterion is especially important in that much of Thiessen's argument tries to distinguish ethical Christian proselytism and

proselytizing by cults, which critics of proselytism may find harder to distinguish than Thiessen.

The second criterion I found particularly helpful is his Tolerance criterion. Much of his work seeks to defend proselytism against critics who argue that an ideal of tolerance precludes any efforts to persuade. Thiessen effectively demonstrates the flaw of this critique in much of the first two thirds of the book, arguing that persuasion is integral to Western philosophical understandings, especially the idea of freedom. For Thiessen, tolerance is built on Christian understandings of love and respect, not on a freedom from persuasive dialogue. Therefore ethical proselytism must be rooted in love and respect that leads to a profound tolerance of all people, though not necessarily all thought.

I found the clear identification of these criteria to be Thiessen's primary contribution. Frankly I wish they were given more attention and focus in the book. In my experience most people's problem with proselytism is not its philosophical foundation but rather that unethical practices so often accompany proselytism. These criteria provide an ethic for persuasive religious conversation in a culture that seems allergic to religious discussion, especially that which attempts to persuade.

Keeping these strengths in mind, I found four parts of his argument could have been strengthened. First, Thiessen equates evangelism, mission, and the making of religious converts with religious proselytizing. Only a minority of people in the field, at least in my own Wesleyan traditions, would equate these four today and

many would find the equation highly problematic. Indeed I would argue that the linking of evangelism and conversion, to the virtual exclusion of awakening and sanctification, is one of the primary challenges to Christian evangelism today. Second, despite his extensive bibliography, he focuses his argument on a few scholars including Jay Newman, Margaret Battin, and David Novak. While these are important, the conversation is broader today. I would love to have read more engagement with the likes of Hitchens and Richard Dawkins.

Third, I found his commentary on marketplace proselytism problematic. For instance he finds justification in religious proselytism (even that of cults) by appealing to society's acceptance of marketplace advertising that he sees as an economic proselytism. As Thiessen correctly demonstrates, most people don't mind persuasion. This is especially evident in politics and marketplace advertising. The problem is he argues that because the latter is acceptable religious proselytism should be as well. In my mind he underplays the unique ethical expectations many people have on religious communities and how unethical proselytism has so tainted ethical practices. In my mind he dismisses too quickly the radical difference between political, marketplace, and religious proselytism. Yet is quite correct to point out that persuasion itself is not the problem. The problem is unethical persuasion.

Fourth, I question if Thiessen correctly associates Muslim and Christian proselytism. Certainly Islam has characteristics that could be loosely defined as missional, but I'm not sure many Muslims would

read this work and see it as an adequate defense of one of Islam's five pillars, namely witness. Furthermore I question if Christian evangelism and Muslim witness are truly equivalent.

That said, I found Thiessen's book, especially his criteria for ethical proselytism and persuasion, to be quite helpful. The Christian faith is inherently missional and central to its mission is the call to use persuasive rhetoric to invite people to the story of God in Christ. Many of the problems with persuasion, evangelism, and mission, in the church's past and present, lie not in these three themselves, but rather in the inclusion of unethical practices that mar the very nature of the Christian witness. Thiessen's criteria for ethical persuasion and proselytism are, therefore, quite helpful to the teaching of mission and evangelism and I plan to incorporate them into my own teaching.

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Van Gelder, Craig and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation.*
Foreword by Alan J. Roxburgh. Grand Rapids: Baker
Academic, 2011. 186 pages

Reviewed by Andrew D. Kinsey

As the days of American Christendom wane, a great deal of literature has emerged dealing with the ministry of the missional church. Over the last decade leaders and scholars from across the evangelical and mainline Protestant landscape have converged on a set of practices and concepts that speak to the way churches may organize

to impact an ever-shifting, even amorphous postmodern culture. The missional church movement has arisen to address these paradigmatic shifts now on the ecclesial radar screen. It is a movement that brings together a wide variety of voices and interests.

Stepping into this conversation are Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile of Luther Seminary. In their provocative book *The Missional Church in Perspective* Gelder and Zscheile continue this conversation and create a helpful “map” for navigating the terrain of the missional church movement. Building on the publication of Darrell Guder’s influential *Missional Church: A Vision of the Sending Church in North America* in 1998, Gelder and Zscheile bring together a wide variety of voices in the missional church and, with skillful sensitivity, allow these voices to speak to the imagination of the church (p. 1). The whole book is a guided meditation or journey into the “missiological consensus” that has emerged over the last decade as well as an *invitation* to understand ways in which the concept of “missional” was initially understood, popularized, and argued (p. 13). Gelder and Zscheile want to explore further the various biblical and theological concepts of the missional movement and to find ways of enriching those concepts through our different Christian faith traditions (p. 14).

Gelder and Zscheile divide the book into two parts. Part one provides an extensive introduction to the missional church conversation, with the first three chapters charting the historical development of the biblical and theological sources underlying the conception of the missional church. Here, Gelder and Zscheile

examine in detail some of the strengths and weaknesses of the missional church as well as reflect on the seminal volume *Missional Church*. In addition, they reflect on the diverse ways the term is used throughout the missional literature. Part two extends this conversation and notes how recent biblical and theological developments continue to shape the core themes embedded in the original missional conversation. Gelder and Zscheile take great care in drawing out the implications of this conversation for the church and the need to relate more fully to the needs of the wider culture. At the end Gelder and Zscheile share how the missional conversation can continue to shape the life of the church in areas of spiritual formation, discipleship, leadership, and organization.

Several points are worth mentioning with respect to *The Missional Church in Perspective*. First, professors and teachers of evangelism and missiology will want to utilize this text as part of the missional church literature. While persons may not always agree with the typology they put forth, they will appreciate the ways Gelder and Zscheile have brought the wide array of voices to the table. This alone is important. Second, the authors practice an invitational style of writing and presentation. The whole structure of the book welcomes further discussion. The text is written not as the last word but as a constructive word of clarification and direction. And third, Gelder and Zscheile lead readers into the key texts and persons that have made the missional church what it is at present, noting how persons like David Bosch, Leslie Newbigin, J. C. Hoekendijk, Darrell Guder, George Hunsberger, Alan Roxburgh have provided significant contributions to

our understanding of the missional church and sharing how organizations like the Gospel and Culture Network and the Leadership Network have fostered the ongoing conversation. In addition, they are able to map the trajectories of the missional church linking the concepts of the missional church movement to the wider ecclesial world of mission and ecumenism, especially as those concepts pertain to the *missio Dei* (p. 31ff). For students of missiology this aspect of the work is instructive.

Finally, two other aspects to the importance of this work for further consideration: first, Gelder and Zscheile rightly point out the significance of the imagination as central to the life of the church's mission in the West (p. 148). Imagination, they insist, has a communal and theological dimension grounded in the workings of the Holy Spirit: as the church cultivates a missional imagination it cultivates the kind of community embodying the life of the triune God. More work is needed in this area, but Gelder and Zscheile make helpful suggestions. And second, Gelder and Zscheile speak about the importance of theological education in the life of the church and the ways in which the missional church movement engages the whole church in the raising up of leaders, both clergy and laity. As the church discerns the future, the role of substantive and imaginative *theological* leadership grows.

Gelder and Zscheile are to be commended for writing this book. The missional church is here to stay. The conversation will continue.

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