

LEARNERS IN ECLECTIC COMMUNITIES: LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES FOR THE
POSTMODERN CHURCH

by

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ABSTRACT

Learners in Eclectic Communities: Leadership Principles for the Postmodern Church

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Many of the foundational suppositions of modernism are being challenged by emerging postmodern ideologies. The shift is creating a challenge for the Canadian church: many of the methods used to lead and communicate in the modernist world are no longer effective postmodern strategies.

The principles that governed modernism—reason, natural law, autonomy, harmony, and progress—are being challenged by the postmodern emphases of experience, mystery, community, diversity, and skepticism. By examining both alternatives using the ancient lens of Scripture we can discover new opportunities for congregational leadership in a changing cultural situation.

This thesis examines leadership characteristics that will be critical for postmodern church leaders, who are called to emphasize experiential spirituality, collaboration, a missional perspective, and personal vulnerability. Their purpose in so doing is to articulate and embody a biblical model of discipleship, while at the same time serving as effective leaders and communicators within twenty-first century Canadian culture.

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INTRODUCTION

FROM THE BOARDROOM TO THE STREETS: LEARNING THE POSTMODERN DANCE

The exhausted auctioneer shook his head and said, “I’ve never seen a church do something so generous for a family in need.” Only weeks before, I had enthusiastically endorsed a charity auction for a family of casual, Sunday morning attendees. Their baby was born prematurely. He survived with severe medical complications—forcing his parents deeper into overdraft. Organized by the couple’s small group, the auction was better planned than an overdue sabbatical.

The gym bulged with close to twice the people of our Sunday morning service. There was something for everyone. The folding tables beckoned sweet-toothed strangers with high fat, high taste desserts. The farmers eyed each other up and down, looking to one-up their competition for the donated tractor oil; a three-year’s supply. And for those looking for an August re-start of their failed New Year’s resolution, a fitness club membership. I was proud of our church: unchurched people participated that evening, thousands of dollars were raised for a family in need and we bonded together, rooting on the newcomer who outbid our beloved Mrs. Bell for the log cabin getaway. Everyone at the auction had a reason to smile.

But while many smiled, some seethed. A handful of angry congregants wrote letters to the Elders—including one Elder’s wife. They were offended that an auction had taken place in “the house of the Lord”. The Elders’ absence from the bidding frenzy was conspicuous, but I knew the dissenter’s ridiculous accusations would be dismissed. Seated around a tiny, laminate table my worst nightmare was realized—the Elders agreed with the letters. I was stunned. They were convinced that God was offended. They argued that other means should have been used to raise the funds.

I was scolded and asked to do what any young pastor might expect—apologize to the congregation.¹

¹ This scenario is based on an actual event that took place at the church that will be referred to throughout this thesis as First Modernist Church. I will use this scenario as an illustration of how modernist-minded and postmodernist-minded people differ in their approach to church leadership.

What went wrong? How could one small group's attempt to show love and care to a family be perceived by others as blatant disobedience to God's word?

How could members of the same church community have such different perspectives on the same event? I believe that the Western church has a communication dilemma. It stems from a tension between people who hold the church's currently entrenched mindset (modernist) and others who operate from the emerging perspective (postmodernist). Both groups could be members of the same church yet they perceive and communicate with the people around them in very different ways.

I believe that if the Western church is to effectively communicate with the emerging postmodern culture it must take seriously the challenge of transitioning from a modernist perspective to one that is less hostile to postmoderns. The above scenario is not an isolated example of how modernists and postmodernists communicate differently. It is an illustration that has been taken from my own life and ministry: it reveals what happened when a growing number of postmoderns clashed with the modernist Elders' board at First Modernist Church. It was a confrontation that resulted primarily from a difference in values and how those values were communicated between postmoderns and modernists. It was a conflict that has become the foundation for my research and writing of this thesis.

Rather than writing about how these two groups are becoming increasingly divided, with no hope of living together in harmony, I will argue that postmodernist leaders must develop and draw from new ways of communicating in order to strengthen relationships between modernists and postmodernists. Communicating with

postmoderns, in particular, will require change. The most significant change will be moving the church's leadership epicenter from the boardroom to the boardwalk.

The boardroom is one of the modernist church's primary communication hubs. It symbolizes the modernist church's priorities of rationalism, autonomy, promoting one harmonious ideal for church growth and Christian discipleship and a quest for human progress.

Postmoderns do not relate to the modernist boardroom. A better illustration of postmodern communication is a street dance. Learning to dance in the streets while drawing the modernists out of the boardroom will be the most important task of the postmodern church leader. By engaging in the dance, without downplaying the modernists who are currently in the boardroom, the postmodern leader can work toward unifying postmoderns and modernists without compromising the gospel message. Robert Nash writes about the Western Church's urgent need to change when he states, "Christianity must present a united front to the world. And that united front must include a spiritual dance that is uniquely Christian, highly missionary, deeply devotional, and, above all else, intensely meaningful."² What Nash calls a spiritual dance is a postmodern model for the church. It is different—more fluid—than the spiritual "business model" that churches have embraced in recent years. The business model was structured like a pyramid in which modern-minded Christians became shareholders and the pastor their CEO. The spiritual dance, however, is a postmodern alternative to the modernist version of the church. And while there are different forms of dance ranging from the formal Waltz to street friendly Popping, they all have at least one thing in common—movement.

² Robert N. Nash Jr., *An 8-Track Church in a CD World: The Modern Church in a Postmodern World* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 1997), 68.

To dance is to move and while the postmodern church is in its initial stages of emergence, conversations about new forms of church are springing up on all continents with particular focus on the more postmodern nations, North America and Europe. I believe these conversations will one day turn into a communal spiritual dance—a global movement.

One of the places where experiments in communal spiritual dancing are spontaneously breaking out is in our own back yard, Canada. But is the Canadian church part of the dance? Reginald Bibby, Professor of Sociology at the University of Lethbridge has discovered an emerging “spiritual renaissance” in his Canada-wide surveys. In his book *Restless Gods* he writes, “The findings point to a religious and spiritual renaissance in Canada—new life being added to old life, sometimes within religious groups but often outside them.”³ Roughly translated, this means the dance is happening largely apart from the institutional church. Therefore, if the Canadian church is to disciple our nation it must learn how to dance.

The goal of this thesis is to discover and develop the traits needed for spiritual leaders to effectively lead the Canadian church into the spiritual dance that has begun in the streets of the nation. These traits will be based on understanding postmodern culture. Understanding postmodern culture requires knowledge of its cultural origins—modernism. An explanation and exploration of modernism, postmodernism and the characteristics of a postmodern church leader will lay the framework for this thesis. Each part will lay the foundation for the following section with the final section (chapters five through eight) being the bulk of the thesis research.

³ Reginald W. Bibby, *Restless Gods: The Renaissance of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Stoddart, 2002), 4.

In chapter one I will examine the guiding principles of modernist church leaders. Using this introduction's opening scenario, I will identify the behaviours and underlying ideologies that contributed to the Elders' request for me to apologize. This will be accomplished by outlining the overarching principles of the Modern period. Modernism roughly spanned the years from the Renaissance to the mid-twentieth century.⁴ It was a period defined primarily by the principles of reason, natural law, autonomy, harmony and human progress.⁵ The central reality around which everything else pivoted was the deification of human reason and society's quest for one overarching absolute Truth.⁶ David Lyon, professor of sociology at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario writes, "Modernity's forward-looking thrust relates strongly to belief in progress and the power of human reason to produce freedom."⁷ Has human reason culminated in the production of freedom or has the freedom-producing machine been broken?

The principles that at one time were the governing force of Western society have begun to crumble, or at least crack. Sometime in the mid to late twentieth century people began to question the two hundred year old overarching Western worldview.⁸ Questions turned to skepticism and modernity's strangle-hold on the culture was loosened. This was the introduction of postmodernism.

⁴ See Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 58. See also Brian J. Walsh and Richard J. Middleton, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1984), 117. Although there is debate about the timeline of modernity, it frames the movement adequately for the purposes of this thesis.

⁵ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 68-70.

⁶ Robert C. Greer's primary differentiation between modernism and postmodernism the former affirms the existence of absolute truths while the latter affirms the opposite. Robert C. Greer, *Mapping postmodernism: a survey of Christian options* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 13.

⁷ David Lyon, *Postmodernity, Concepts in Social Thought*, ed. Frank Parkin (Berkshire, U.K: Open University, 1994; reprint, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1996), 19 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

⁸ Robert C. Greer, *Mapping postmodernism*, 13.

In chapter two of this thesis I will once again turn to the auction scenario as a way of understanding postmodern communication strategies. I will also examine the small group's discipleship priorities and their reasons for organizing the auction. I will define the principles of postmodernism and the critical differences between modernism and postmodernism. While postmodernism differs from modernism there is also a natural connection between the two. Brian McLaren notes, "Postmodernity is not antimodernity. The prefix post means 'flowing on from or coming after,' not 'unilaterally rejecting or naively dismissing.' The term suggests continuity as well as discontinuity."⁹ Unlike modernism, postmodernism is diverse and unable to be neatly dissected. The character Neo, from Brian McLaren's book, *A New Kind of Christian*, frames the diverse and eclectic nature of postmodern philosophy well when he says, "My personal hunch is that there may not ever be a single dominating, monolithic postmodern philosophy, but rather that postmodern philosophy itself may be a pluralistic umbrella making room for many diverse philosophical voices within it."¹⁰ Some of those diverse philosophical voices are bound to be from the modern period since our society is still markedly modern. Yet while aspects of our society are modern there are emerging trends among the younger segment of the population that are strikingly postmodern.

These trends can be seen in the principles or emphases of postmodernism: experience, mystery, community, diversity and skepticism/pessimism. While this list is not exhaustive it highlights some important deviations from modernism. Andy Crouch creatively illustrates this trend when he writes:

⁹ Brian D. McLaren, *The Church in Emerging Culture: five perspectives*, ed. Leonard Sweet (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 66.

¹⁰ Brian D. McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 20.

The certainties of the modern era are lost. Everything is relative. Scientific certainty is a myth (or a language game or a social construct), and the new generation, who are coming along fast and are about to invade your church (or who are staying away from your church in droves because you are so deucedly modern), don't believe in Truth. They are much more interested in Narrative, or Mystery, or just Nose Rings.¹¹

Postmodernism has changed the way people relate to one another and the culture. But instead of trying to understand the shift, the Western church has remained grounded on the bedrock of modernity. As a result, its primary reaction to postmodernism and those who operate from a postmodern framework has been negative. Instead of embarking on an introspective journey; the Western church has instead tended to cling to its modernist ideals in its attempt to elude postmodernism.

So far, I have pitted modernists against postmodernists; I have done that to clarify the differences, not to promote divisions. Is there a way forward for postmodern church leaders who lead in a mixed modernist/postmodernist context? I believe there is and describing the challenges and potential opportunities of that context will be the focus of chapter three.

Chapters four through eight of this thesis will be an introspective look into the role of church leaders. I will explore the principles and values critical to leadership in the postmodern church. Since the characteristics of postmodernity radically diverge from those of modernity, we must be prepared for the Western church to look distinctively different. Tom Sine writes, "I am convinced that a little tinkering and fine-tuning won't be of much help in our lives, churches, or Christian organizations. We will need to find

¹¹ Andy Crouch, "Life After Postmodernity," in *The Church in Emerging Culture: five perspectives*, ed. Leonard Sweet (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 65.

ways to reinvent how we live our lives and act out our faith, if we hope to effectively address the challenges of a new millennium.”¹²

If Sine’s words are accurate, and I believe they are, then postmodern church leaders will need to do more than tweak a few skills to become more culturally relevant. They will need to embrace a new paradigm of what it means to be a disciple and a leader in the twenty-first century. They will need to discover and hone new skills and priorities as they minister. Their lives will be characterized by an experiential faith and learning, a mystical spirituality, a collaborative leadership style, building a missional community, and a genuine vulnerability. In anticipation of a fuller treatment of these principles, each may be summarized briefly as follows.

To live a life characterized by *an experiential faith and learning* means emphasizing experience and participation in congregational discipleship. The focus of discipleship moves from classroom-centered teaching to learning via immersion into the culture of the community. Reggie McNeal writes, “Research into learning reveals that it is not necessarily linear or even cognitive. Learning must be continual and extend beyond the classroom.”¹³ Faith and learning are not simply intellectual pursuits for postmoderns, neither can they be for church leaders.

Life characterized by a *mystical spirituality* demands surrendering the false dualism that currently exists between the sacred and secular. Walsh and Middleton write, “The kingdom of God (or the sacred) comes to be identified primarily with the church,

¹² Tom Sine, *Mustard seed vs. McWorld: Reinventing Life and Faith for the Future* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 17.

¹³ Reggie McNeal, *A Work of Heart: Understanding how God shapes Spiritual Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 84.

while the rest of life is seen as secular.”¹⁴ This false dichotomy is swallowed up by the holistic spirituality of the postmodern leader. Holistic spirituality acknowledges the mystical and mysterious dimensions of faith which have been minimized by the rationalistic spirituality of modernity. Today, postmoderns can speak of spirituality without ever mentioning God.¹⁵

Living as a *collaborative leader* requires an egalitarian perspective and a willingness to surrender authority, empowering others. Collaborative leadership hinges on the issue of power—whether it is given away or held. Postmodern leaders must serve and free people. They respect individuals and recognize that each person has God-given resources that are necessary for community enhancement.

Building a diverse community is a challenging yet essential task of postmodern church leaders. They must learn to lead in multi-generational and multi-cultural environments, in which people of different ages and cultures intermingle and worship together as an example of the heavenly reality (Rev. 7:9).¹⁶ The stratification of ages in congregational discipleship and the segregation of cultures into ethnically homogeneous communities are tools of the modernist Western church. But they lack the Apostle Paul’s ideal of a “one household”¹⁷ community that is not divided artificially by race, class or age. Postmodern communities are formed with diversity in mind.

Finally, to live in a *genuinely vulnerable* state means learning to be publicly transparent, rejecting authoritarian or hierarchical leadership styles in favour of the

¹⁴ Walsh and Middleton, *The Transforming Vision*, 96.

¹⁵ Reggie McNeal, *A Work of Heart*, 81.

¹⁶ Dan Sheffield, *The Multi-Cultural Leader: Developing a Catholic Personality* (Toronto: Clements, 2004), 37.

¹⁷ See Ephesians 3:19-22 (NIV) where Paul writes about “foreigners and aliens” becoming part of one grand household which is ‘joined together’ with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone.

Apostle Paul's leadership priority—weakness (2 Cor. 12:9-10). In a culture of skepticism, even pessimism, regarding the limits of human accomplishment it is paramount that postmodern leaders come to terms with their own shortcomings. In a survey conducted in a cross section of Canadian churches, Don Posterski and Gary Nelson discovered common characteristics of what they labeled “Future Faith Churches.” In their book by the same title they write:

Our research reveals that future faith congregations are looking for transparency and trustworthy character in their leaders. They seek to be led by leaders who understand life and are vulnerable in their relationships. Rather than revering preachers in positions lifted up six feet above contradiction, the folks in the pews are responding to real people.¹⁸

A willingness and ability to lead from personal weakness and brokenness is a crucial characteristic of twenty-first century spiritual leaders.

The dance has begun. I have written this thesis as a “how to” manual for others in the Canadian church as we begin to understand, and perhaps even learn some new steps in, the postmodern spiritual dance; it is also an invitation to join the dance. Spiritual leaders who are serious about ministry in a postmodern world must enter the dance. The church cannot be content to make plans in the boardroom, doing “business as usual” and keeping the shareholders happy. Now is the time to learn how to dance.

¹⁸ Don Posterski and Gary Nelson, *Future Faith Churches: Reconnecting with the Power of the Gospel for the 21st Century* (Winfield: Wood Lake, 1997), 85.

ONE

THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF MODERNIST CHURCH LEADERS

There was one overarching problem that created tension between the church leaders and my small group. It was not primarily an issue of personalities; rather it resulted from differing languages and worldviews. The church leaders were approaching the situation from a modernist perspective. My small group and I however, were postmoderns.¹

When the modernist church leaders addressed the auction they examined it based on their set of values and presuppositions. Those values and presuppositions will be the focus of this chapter. The postmoderns, on the other hand, approached the auction with a different set of presuppositions. Those presuppositions will be the subject of the following chapter. Before exploring the values of the church leaders, we must first gain a brief understanding of how modernism became the predominant Western worldview.

Modernist Principles Emerging from the Enlightenment

The church leaders' values and presuppositions were based on a worldview with roots that date back to the Enlightenment and the early eighteenth century.² Even though the early Enlightenment thinkers and the church leaders at First Modernist Church were

¹ Obviously, there are problems in labeling groups. While neither group in the scenario can be labeled purely modernist or purely postmodernist, their actions and perspectives serve to illustrate the fundamental differences between modernism and postmodernism. As such, their actions and perspectives will be helpful in framing the typical modernist and postmodernist responses to church leadership in this chapter and the next.

² Walsh and Middleton claim, "The roots of modernism can be traced back to sometime between 1470 (the origin of the Italian Renaissance) and 1700 (the beginning of the Age of Enlightenment)." Walsh and Middleton, *The Transforming Vision*, 117.

separated by centuries, both groups were operating from seemingly identical presuppositions. Western society is in a transition from modernism to postmodernism, yet the church is still largely governed by modernist principles. Therefore, those principles must be examined and evaluated to determine how they affected the decisions of the First Modernist Church leaders.

Five principles govern the modernist worldview: Reason, Nature, Autonomy, Harmony and Human Progress.³ While each principle profoundly affects modernist culture, none is more significant than the principle of reason. As Gene Edward Veith Jr. writes, “Reason alone, so they thought, may now replace the reliance on the supernatural born out of the ignorance of ‘unenlightened’ times.”⁴

Reason

In the modernist worldview, reason replaced revelation as the arbiter of truth.⁵ While Donald Wood’s perception is not fully accurate, he describes the prominence of reason as the medieval era gave way to modernism:

Following Bacon and Descartes, the process of scientific reasoning was established as a cornerstone of modern culture. Men and women no longer would have to depend on divine guidance, witchcraft, astrology, and Ouija boards. They could now determine their affairs rationally.⁶

Reason moved humanity from their position as God’s subjects into a place of authority—juxtaposed to God. As indicated in his famous phrase “Knowledge is power”, Francis Bacon stated, “Knowledge mediates power over our circumstances; it offers the ability to

³ These principles come from Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 68-70. I am grateful for his explanation of the Enlightenment and Modernism. His five principles will be the framework for my examination and explanation of the First Modernist Church leaders’ reaction to the auction.

⁴ Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture*, Turning Point Christian Worldview Series, ed. Marvin Olasky (Wheaton: Crossway, 1994), 33.

⁵ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 68.

⁶ Donald N. Wood, *The Unraveling of the West: The Rise of Postmodernism and the Decline of Democracy* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003), 15.

alter our circumstances to conform to our desires.”⁷ Along with Bacon, Enlightenment philosopher René Decartes demonstrated uncompromising confidence in reason. Stanley Grenz describes Decartes’ understanding of reason in these words:

His elevation of mathematical knowledge was not arbitrary: he believed that because the truths of mathematics arise from the nature of reason itself, they are more certain than knowledge derived from empirical observation, which may be faulty.⁸

Reason itself was understood to be more trustworthy than empirical observation. The mind was no longer a passive space in the body for the acquisition of knowledge. It became the device used to organize and control all of life. As Alan J. Roxburgh writes, “Knowledge was no longer something given to humanity from the outside; it was imposed on the world through the categories and powers of the human mind.”⁹ Knowledge was not offered by God to humanity; rather it was something that could be gained through the implementation of the greatest human faculty—reason.

Nature

The principle of natural law taught that the universe itself is an orderly realm governed by the laws of nature.¹⁰ The laws of nature were consistent, reliable, and void of mystery. Any unexplained phenomenon was understood to be governed by a natural law that had yet to be discovered, rather than having a magical, spiritual, or supernatural cause. The Modern Age’s reliance on natural law thus created a vacuum for the supernatural. Immanuel Kant, known as modernism’s greatest philosopher, separated the

⁷ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), pp. 123-24. Quoted in Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 59.

⁸ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 64.

⁹ Alan J. Roxburgh, *Reaching a New Generation: Strategies for Tomorrow’s Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 33.

¹⁰ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 68.

mysterious and essentially inaccessible world of the supernatural from the natural world that could be known. He believed that human beings could know nothing of reality as it is in itself (Kant calls this the *noumenal* world) but only as it appears through experience (he calls this the *phenomenal* world).¹¹ Therefore, those things in nature that could not be measured—the supernatural for example—also could not be known. The mystery and transcendence of God, so prominent in the Pre-Modern Age, was no longer important. Nature and its laws became the key to unlocking all the mysteries of the universe.

Autonomy

Closely tied to the principle of natural law was the principle of human autonomy. Grenz writes, “Each person was supposed to follow the path toward the discovery of the natural law by using his or her personal endowment of reason and conscience, and it was assumed that doing so would produce a well-ordered life.”¹² René Decartes writes about arriving at what he calls his “first principle” through autonomous reason:

Since this truth, *I think, therefore I am, [or exist,]* was so firm and assured that all the most extravagant suppositions of the skeptics were unable to shake it, I judged that I could safely accept it as the first principle of the philosophy I was seeking.¹³

Decartes arrived at his philosophical foundation through isolation and autonomy. Walsh and Middleton summarize this common Enlightenment belief when they write, “In the modern world view, man becomes a law (*nomos*) unto himself (*autos*).”¹⁴ It was this principle primarily that allowed democracy—the right and ability of all people to choose

¹¹ Ed. L. Miller, *Questions that Matter An Invitation to Philosophy*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996), 268.

¹² Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 69.

¹³ René Decartes, *Discourse on the Method*, part 4, trans. Laurence J. Lafleur (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill, 1960), 24. Quoted in Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 65.

¹⁴ Walsh and Middleton, *The Transforming Vision*, 119.

their leader—to emerge as a legitimate form of governance. It was also this principle that gave the general population greater freedom: freedom to think independently, to embrace greater individual responsibility, and to demand privacy.¹⁵

Harmony

With an autonomous humanity all living under the same natural laws, the logical conclusion was assumed to be movement toward a common, harmonious truth. Enlightenment thinkers, according to Grenz, “...viewed harmony not merely as a characteristic of the realm of nature but as a type of ethical principle that should govern human action.”¹⁶ With an overarching ideal of common goals, modern humanity directed people of differing cultures and backgrounds toward a similar end. There was no room for difference in worldviews or global pursuits in the modernist ideal of oneness. Middleton and Walsh describe the Enlightenment goal of harmony in these words: “What was envisioned by increasing numbers of people...was a veritable utopia of prosperity and progress in which the whole human race would be united.”¹⁷ The call to abandon diverse and distinct traditions in order to embrace a common ideal was central to the modern Western goal of harmony.

Human Progress

Progress characterized modernity at every step of its development. Donald Wood captures the spirit of modern human progress when he writes:

We could change. We could grow. We could expand and develop. We would find new lands to exploit, new industrial techniques, and new markets for our increasingly modern products. This concept of

¹⁵ For more detail on these three characteristics of autonomous humanity see Wood, *The Unraveling of the West*, 16.

¹⁶ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 70.

¹⁷ J. Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 19.

continual growth and development dominated modern thinking, largely unchallenged, until the last half of the twentieth century.¹⁸

The Modern Age was thus a time of great optimism, optimism fostered by the principle of universal human progress. In their book, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be*, Middleton and Walsh equate the Enlightenment vision of progress with the biblical story of Babel:

The myth of progress started with a grand dream or vision that began to emerge only in the fifteenth century. This cultural aspiration, symbolized by Columbus's quest for a new ocean route to Asia, looked not to the past and the known but to the future and the unknown. It was a bold and daring vision, one remarkably similar to that of the builders of the tower of Babel.¹⁹

By equating the modern quest for progress with Babel, Middleton and Walsh caution readers to look at the motivations for this principle. While the motivations of Columbus and the builders of Babel may have differed, the goal was the same—human autonomy, progress, and achievement.

Not everyone considers this principle a detriment. Neil Postman's view, for example, differs considerably. For Postman, the modern principle of progress was, "One of the Enlightenment's great gifts."²⁰ Whether the principle of human progress was a gift, a downfall or both in the modern era is open to debate. Yet it was certainly a factor in how the leaders at First Modernist church interpreted the events that unfolded during and after the auction.

¹⁸ Wood, *The Unraveling of the West*, 17.

¹⁹ Middleton and Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be*, 15.

²⁰ Neil Postman, *Building a Bridge to the 18th Century: How the Past Can Improve Our Future* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 34.

Interpreting the Leaders' Actions at First Modernist Church using Modernist Principles

At first glance the space between principles that emerged in the Enlightenment and principles that guide the world today seems huge, a quantum leap. Yet the following analysis of the leaders at First Modernist Church, will suggest that their philosophical outlook does not deviate significantly from that of the early Enlightenment thinkers, with whom they share a common worldview. This section of the thesis will attempt to use Grenz's Enlightenment principles as a framework for interpreting the leaders' responses to the auction. Only four of the five principles will be examined in this chapter: the principle of nature and its postmodern response will be left until chapter five. The reason for nature's exclusion is not because it necessarily lies outside the framework of the church leaders; rather it did not play a direct role in the conflict surrounding the auction.

The following analysis is not meant to condemn the church leaders' character. It is simply intended to examine their actions exhibited in "the autonomous boardroom".²¹

Reason Informs Reality

From a modernist perspective, reason allows individuals to determine many aspects of their reality. Just as René Decartes believed his thinking determined his being, modernists believe their intellect determines their reality. The modernist begins with reason in order to inform the experience, rather than allowing the experience to inform the reason. As a result, reason does not always value personal experience in forming its presuppositions.

When I was invited into the boardroom at First Modernist Church, I eagerly

²¹ This term will be explained later in this section.

agreed to talk to the Elders about one of the year's most successful events—the auction. I knew that some people in the congregation were upset that the auction had been held in their church, but I also trusted the Elders' ability to process the criticism based on experiential evidence from those who had been there. Naturally, when the Elders sided with the critics I was dumbfounded, since my own experience had been so positive. I could not think of any reasons why they were so upset. There was a problem, however, a worldview problem.

The Elders had not attended the auction, for they had no reason to. The very idea of an auction was contrary to how they interpreted the biblical text. After complaints had been lodged the Elders needed a logical response. In fact, they arrived at a radical response. They pulled out an argument from one of the three critical letters that they had received: the events of the auction were equated with the Gospel account of Jesus clearing the temple. Their argument was simple, logical, and unquestionably authoritative; how could the Christian church endorse an activity that was clearly incongruent with Scripture?

The Elders came up with a logical, rational response to the situation. Yet one issue haunted me. They were more interested in critical letters that were written by people who had not attended the auction than they were in hearing from the people who had been physically present that evening. Their first concern was developing a rational framework for helping people understand why the auction was “dishonouring to God”,²² instead of considering the actual experiences of those in attendance?

²² The words “dishonouring to God” were actually used to describe the auction. It was used to further the Elders' argument about why the auction should not have happened.

We may, of course, suspect any number of underlying motives—desire to placate the complainants, irritation that they had not been consulted earlier, and uncertainty about the proper use of “sacred” space. But the manner in which they chose to respond reflects the workings of what we may term the “modern mind.” David Lyon insightfully describes the modern mind and its powerful “tool” of reason when he writes, “Nature could be ‘tamed’, workers made docile, books balanced, and complexity contained, all by the application of the tool of rationality.”²³ Life is complex, yet the rational mind is able to tame and contain such complexity. It is interested in interpreting events less through the variegated lens of personal experience but by means of intellectual systematization it is able to control complex situations.

First Modernist Church is only one example of a church that appeals to principles over relationships, reason over experience, and concept over practice, in a way that controls, dominates, and creates distance between leaders and congregants. Spencer Burke, creator and moderator of TheOoze.com, highlights one blogger’s rant about modern church leadership in his book *Making Sense of Church*. He writes:

Yes, I know we need leadership in the church. I got that. My problem is the model of leadership I have personally seen. It is more based on controlling others and propping up the ridiculous insecurities of the so-called leaders than actually serving others and building them up in Christ.²⁴

In response to the above comment, another blogger posted these words, “Leadership, to be effective, must be relational at its base (this is true now more than ever).”²⁵ For leaders, to value principles over relationships creates distance between themselves and

²³ David Lyon, *Postmodernity*, 24.

²⁴ Spencer Burke, *Making Sense of Church: Eavesdropping on Emerging Conversations about God, Community, and Culture*, ed. David Sanford (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 37.

²⁵ Burke, *Making Sense of Church*, 37.

those they have been called to serve. Their ideas about life, faith and community dictate the shape and meaning of experience, rather than allowing their principles to be shaped and informed by their interactions with the real world. They have been so busy trying to create perfect communities that they have failed to see the opportunities that the real world offers for informing their ideas. If the Elders had approached the small group or asked me about how the auction might have been a fulfillment of Scripture rather than desolation, we would have cited the presence of joy, peace and compassion as examples of God's blessing and provision on the evening.

Perhaps the reason why modernist church leaders have been increasingly dependant on rationalism to inform their worldview, rather than experience, has been their fear of fostering "anti-intellectualism" in the Western church.²⁶ While anti-intellectualism is a legitimate concern, I doubt that drawing on experiences to inform one's worldview would detract from living and thinking holistically as a Christian. Unfortunately, many modernists have downplayed the role of experience in favour of a purely rationalistic approach to faith and biblical interpretation. As a result, they have locked themselves into the most prominent place of decision-making that North American culture provides—the boardroom.

The Autonomous Boardroom

Along with the modernist priority of reason has emerged the principle of autonomy. One of the greatest examples of autonomous leadership is the boardroom. The boardroom is synonymous with corporate power. It is the place where major

²⁶ "As Mark Noll documents in *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, there is a strong strain of anti-intellectualism in American Protestantism, particularly in the conservative or evangelical tradition." Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 12. Quoted in Tom Sine, *Mustard Seed Vs. McWorld*, 146.

organizational decisions and plans are made, and from which modernist leaders govern corporations and companies. Sadly, churches sometimes fail to question the methods and assumptions prevalent in corporate culture where it comes to “governing” the church. As a result, many modernist churches became subject to the stranglehold of leaders who exercise their power in isolation and autonomy, removed from their community.

At First Modernist Church, when the leaders needed to make a decision or solve a problem, they went to the church boardroom. Therefore, it was no surprise that we encircled the boardroom table when conflict over the auction broke out. After all, the Elders had been appointed to positions of power and their power was greatest there. Their positions allowed them to exercise control in an autonomous manner.²⁷ They were not involved in the planning or operation of the auction. In fact, they were not even in attendance that evening. Yet their absence from the auction did not disqualify them from using their duly appointed, managerial powers. Their assessment and conclusions appear to have been drawn without attempt to understand the experiences of the people involved. They did not have to enter the community in order to exercise their power and control. Their power was in their autonomy.

John Maxwell is a good example of a modernist leader whose power lies in his position to influence other strong leaders at the top of his organization. In fact, rather than seeing the community as crucial to leadership, he advocates that a small core of strong, independent leaders is the key to strong leadership: “Every leader’s potential is determined by the people closest to him. If those people are strong, then the leader can

²⁷ David Lyon calls autonomy and control “twin ideas”. Lyon, *Postmodernity*, 33.

make a huge impact. If they are weak, he can't."²⁸ He challenges church leaders to dismiss weak leaders and replace them with stronger, more capable leaders.

Autonomous leaders need to exercise power and control in order to get things accomplished. Their elevated positions demand that they be production oriented. When things get out of control, they will be held responsible. Therefore, one of the potential pitfalls for modernist, autonomous leaders is in using their power to serve themselves rather than their community. One example of top-down power is found in Bill Hybels book, *Courageous Leadership*. Hybels is senior pastor of one of the largest churches in North America. He has a lot at stake when it comes to effective church leadership. He would be the first to agree with Maxwell about the need to surround oneself with strong, capable leaders. But strong, capable leadership teams come with a price. They tend to stop at nothing to create equally strong and capable organizations to lead. And in strong organizations, failure and weakness are not options. Speaking to his leadership team Hybels writes:

‘If any of you feel disinclined to get on board with this plan, feel free to find another church ministry that you can fully support. No hard feelings, but it’s a new day here.’

I believe there are times when a leader has to draw a line in the sand. There comes a time when an issue has been processed into oblivion, and a leader must take action.²⁹

“No hard feelings, but it’s a new day here?” In other words, “My plan is more important than you.” Hybels authority comes straight from his position as the top rung in the Willow Creek leadership ladder. Like First Modernist Church, Hybels and his leadership team know well the powers of the autonomous boardroom. It is a place where leaders

²⁸ John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You* (Nashville: Nelson, 1998), 110.

²⁹ Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 64.

separate themselves from the broader community in order to maintain control and keep the organization running smoothly.

The Harmony of Uniformity

Modernism emphasized reason and autonomy as society's building-blocks but it also touted harmony as the way to make those blocks fit together. Harmony, to a modernist, means fitting all information into one, uniform truth. It takes that which is naturally complex and tries to fit it into a simple, uniform whole. Modernist church leaders tend to perform this function as well. They take complex situations, involving relationship conflicts, and bend them until those conflicts conform to their simple, harmonious ideals.

At First Modernist Church the leaders perceived a dilemma when the critical letters were written. They saw that people were upset and set out to solve the problem in the boardroom. Their response was an attempt to re-create a perceived harmony that was crucial to the health of First Modernist Church. To them, the most important value in the church was harmony: that meant a common manifestation of belief and practice among all members. By attending prayer meetings rather than Bible studies, congregants would naturally become more spiritual. By performing certain movements with our bodies during corporate singing, it was perceived that we were more in touch with the Holy Spirit. In creating an environment where everyone practised the same things, the leadership believed the church was progressing. While similar practices and belief were important for the congregation as a whole, the focus on harmony was evident in two areas in particular: their leadership selection process and the basis of church programmes at First Modernist Church.

The Leadership Selection Process: Good leaders all think the same way

Once a year at First Modernist Church, when it came time to select new elders, a special team was organized. It consisted of the two pastors (of which I was one), at least one current Elder and one or two hand picked people who were known to be “discerning”.³⁰ That group would meet a few times to decide which congregants should be approached to serve as the next Elder. Once the discernment team had achieved absolute harmony, or at least the final dissenter³¹ was quieted, the potential Elder would be approached and asked if they would be willing to be interviewed. If they showed signs of independent thinking, which was outside the ideological framework of the current Elders, their name would not be forwarded to the congregation for approval. If however, they conformed to the Elders’ harmonious ideal; their name would be forwarded and unanimously recommended to the congregation by the discernment team.

This process guarded against diverse ideas and views from ever entering the autonomous boardroom. The Elders believed that one of the marks of spiritual maturity within the church was to have members and adherents who increasingly thought and acted in a similar fashion. At First Modernist Church, the goal was to eliminate differing ideas of orthopraxy and for congregants to live and act according to one, singular, defined way of living. Therefore, the conflict created by the auction meant that either those who wrote the letters or those who organized the auction had to be out of step with the church’s harmonious vision and ultimately, out of step with God.

³⁰ A “discerning” person at First Modernist Church was someone who attended prayer meetings consistently, someone who was not outspoken or dominant, and someone who tended to be emotionally responsive and receptive to the pastor’s preaching in corporate worship settings.

³¹ If there was a dissenter that person would certainly not be asked to sit on that team the following year.

The Basis of Church Programmes: Good programmes attract the same types of people

At First Modernist Church one of the things done well was programmes. There was at least one ministry programme each night of the week. And every programme had a specific target group. There was a children's night, a Junior High night, and a High school night. There were Bible studies for women, men, and couples. There were small groups for young families, retirees, and stay-at-home moms. Almost every type of person was categorically divided into homogeneous groups for ministry purposes. This type of categorization has been adopted as a ministry template, not only by First Modernist Church, but also by many modernist churches. Rick Warren, author of *The Purpose Driven Church*, describes his church's strategy for reaching out to the typical unchurched person in his area. He writes:

Saddleback Sam is the typical unchurched man who lives in our area. His age is late thirties or early forties. He has a college degree and may have an advanced degree. (The Saddleback Valley has one of the highest household education levels in America.) He is married to Saddleback Samantha, and they have two kids, Steve and Sally.³²

Warren is clear that his church attracts people who are similar to him and his leadership team. They place a high value on creating a culture where the awkwardness of diversity is absent and the comfort of likeminded people is present. The modernist church is good at classifying and categorizing people based on gender, age, race, and life stage. After all, that is much easier than trying to create an environment where people intermingle with those who are different. Harmony is the goal of modernist church programmes. But is a homogeneous church what Jesus intended?³³ Is it possible that the modernist church

³² Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 169.

³³ My response to this question will be stated in the next chapter. In chapter 7 I will argue the need for missional leaders in the postmodern church.

has settled for the easy task of loving the like-minded and neglected the hard task of loving those who are different?

The Progression toward Perfection

Every church leader dreams that one day their conflict laden church will be perfect: having rooted out all of the pastor's dissenters so that everyone will be able to get along and be morally good. It is not an overt display of pride but a belief that Christian discipleship equals a progression toward perfection. Yet it is the very aspiration toward church perfection that fuels three attitudes among modernist church leaders: a spirit of elitism, a mistrust of the laity, and an intolerance of failure.

A spirit of elitism

First Modernist Church's Elders were selective in their choice of other leaders. They had high standards for themselves and those who served under their leadership. In their quest for a perfect church they did not recognize the spirit of elitism that had crept into their philosophy of leadership. When the Elders met with me to discuss the letters written in response to the auction, they failed to see the auction organizers as their equals. The Elders relied on their positions as First Modernist Church's "religious elite", instead of approaching the auction organizers to gain understanding and perspective.

Religious elitism is particularly dangerous since leaders can be perceived as being endowed with extra authority, authority from God. Richard Foster writes, "Those who are a law unto themselves and at the same time take on a mantle of piety are particularly corruptible. When we are convinced that what we are doing is identical with the

kingdom of God, anyone who opposes us *must* be wrong.”³⁴ When leaders believe they have a special knowledge and authority that is lacking in other members of their congregation, then they are in danger of possessing a spirit of elitism. When leaders expect those in their congregations to attain a certain level of spirituality before their voice will be heard, they have entered the category of the religious elite.

A mistrust of the laity

Corresponding to a spirit of elitism is a mistrust of the laity. The only people qualified to make key decisions are the religious elite. Therefore the laity is seen as less knowledgeable and capable of church governance. An “us-and-them” perspective develops that subconsciously creeps into the leadership mentality.

At First Modernist Church it was clear who the Elders trusted and who they did not. Since one of the letters had been written by an Elder’s wife, the lines were drawn before any of us sat down to talk. The Elders trusted their own judgments. They also trusted the thoughts and opinions of their spouses. Since one of the letters was written by an Elder’s spouse, the case was closed. It became easier for the Elders to trust someone who was married into the inner circle of leadership, rather than asking for the perspective of one of the outsider auction organizers. When weighed against the letter written by the Elder’s wife, the actions of the auction organizers were viewed skeptically. All that was needed was a public apology from the person responsible for that group, me.

An intolerance of failure

Modernist church leaders are often intolerant of failure. They strive for

³⁴ Richard Foster, *The Challenge of the Disciplined Life: Christian Reflections on Money, Sex and Power* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1985), 178.

excellence, believing that excellence is the best form of evangelism: when the church is seen as a spiritual utopia by the surrounding community then Christian witness will be effective.

At First Modernist Church there was an emphasis on doing things with excellence. When complaints about the auction were addressed to the Elders, one of their concerns was the church's example in the larger community. They saw the auction as something that cheapened the church's witness in the community. One Elder's disappointment was conveyed when he questioned how the unchurched community would perceive a church that held an auction. He was concerned that First Modernist Church had failed to provide the secular community with a spiritual example of excellence: one that demonstrated faithful obedience to the Scriptures rather than reliance on gambling techniques used in auctioning off material goods.

One advocate for excellence in ministry as a kingdom witness is Bill Hybels.

Addressing Harvard business school students, Hybels' words are:

You also need to realize that some of us church leaders live daily with the realization that the eternal destinies of people in our communities hang in the balance. That's why we are so determined to get our visions right and live out our values and come up with effective strategies. We truly believe that it matters that we attain our goals. It matters that we align our staffs and leverage our resources.³⁵

Hybels believes the church must use all of the best resources available. Business principles and practices are grafted into his modern megachurch in order to minister effectively to the surrounding culture. For Hybels, the worst that could happen is for the church to fail. Failing churches communicate a painful message to their communities:

³⁵ Hybels, *Courageous Leadership*, 70.

the church cannot compete with the secular culture. Instead the church appears weak and vulnerable. But are weakness and vulnerability negative church traits?

Alan Roxburgh comments on the successful church business model that governs modernist church leadership:

In modernity, technical rationality and instrumental reason become prime modes of social function. Calculation and technique are arbiters of purpose and effectiveness. Anxiety over loss of place and decline in the churches translates into a focus on technique and calculation. Emphasis on models of church growth, church marketing, and entrepreneurial leadership reflect the uneasy, marginal consciousness of the churches. Numerical growth is the talisman that all is well with our ecclesiological souls... Technique is the primary method for reestablishing the church's place in the culture. God is but a legitimating footnote of ecclesiology.³⁶

Is God a modernist church footnote? If success is the highest value in the modernist church there must be some biblical evidence to support that idea. In 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, the apostle Paul describes a guiding value in his life and ministry:

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.³⁷

Weakness is strength, only hidden. Or as Rob Bell summarizes the above passage, "weak is the new strong."³⁸ Clearly there is a difference between the modernist church's priorities and those of the apostle Paul.

³⁶ Alan J. Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership, and Liminality*, Christian Mission and Modern Culture, eds. Alan Neely, H. Wayne Pipkin, and Wilbert R. Shenk (Harrisburg: Trinity, 1997), 20.

³⁷ 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (NIV). All Scripture taken from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise stated.

³⁸ Quoted in Andy Crouch, "The Emergent Mystique," *Christianity Today*, 48 November 2004, 37.

Summary

The modernist worldview is based on Enlightenment principles. The principles of reason, nature, autonomy, harmony and progress have profoundly shaped the culture and the church. The leaders at First Modernist Church led from priorities that were foundational not only to modernism's shaping but also the self-understanding of the Western church.

Modernist minded church leaders operate from the perspective that reason informs reality. A framework built on reason informs life experience. The First Modernist Church Elders were confident in their ability to properly exegete scriptural truth. Therefore their rational approach provided little room to interpret reality based on the experiences of others.

The autonomous boardroom is the epicenter of authority in the modernist church. Leaders use their power in isolation from their community to control complex situations. At First Modernist Church, the Elders used the boardroom as a comfortable cushion. It kept them from the challenges of working out problems where they began—in community. Leaders relied on their positions of autonomy to make decisions while remaining removed and detached from the rest of the congregation.

Creating harmony is the aim of the modernist Western church. Uniform communities are cultivated where differences are eliminated through the discipleship process. Conflict in the modernist church arises when people become unwilling to conform to the ideal vision of the church and its leaders. At First Modernist Church, both the leaders and the programmes were chosen to create a uniform look and feel for the whole church. Leaders were selected based on whether they were similar in character and ecclesiology to the existing Elders. Likewise, new ministry programmes were

funneled through the Elders for approval before being launched. This was done to keep the church's harmonious vision, of creating an ideal Christian community, from being compromised.

Finally, the modernist church progressively edges toward perfection. Christian discipleship is equated with a progression toward perfection. Progress oriented churches believe that doing things with excellence leads to an effective community witness. At First Modernist Church the progression toward perfection created a spirit of elitism, a mistrust of the laity, and an intolerance of failure. Yet for all of their emphasis on progressing toward perfection there was little transformation in the church or community.

The modernist church has become dependent on principles that laid the foundation of the Enlightenment. And while the culture has shifted the church has remained grounded on the principles developed in this chapter. But those principles are breaking down. Postmodernism has emerged. With its emergence there is a demand for a critical examination of the church and its leadership priorities. That critical examination of the church from a postmodern perspective will be the theme of the following chapter.

TWO

THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF POSTMODERNS

The leaders at First Modernist Church failed to recognize the distinct differences that existed between themselves and the postmodern small group. Their perceptions were different. In fact, their worldviews were directly opposed to each other. The clash of divergent worldviews is not a problem that is unique to First Modernist Church. It is a challenge the Western church has been wrestling against for the last half of the twentieth century. Many people in Canadian churches have Enlightenment principles embedded in their beliefs and behavioural systems. The First Modernist Church leaders are one example. But there are also people who have witnessed the discrepancies and inconsistencies of Enlightenment principles. Their questions about the dominant modernist worldview are creating tension in the church.

By way of example, the responses of the small group who organized the auction will be examined in this chapter. Those responses will be used to illustrate some of the priorities and principles of postmodernism. Before the priorities and principles of postmodernism can be explored, a brief explanation of postmodernism and its emergence must come first.

Postmodern Principles Emerging from Inconsistencies within Modernism

Postmodernism is a relatively recent movement. The seed of postmodernism took root because of inconsistencies in Enlightenment principles. Grenz describes postmodernism's emergence:

The modern world was not built in a day, of course, and neither was the postmodern rejection of modernity. It was preceded by certain intellectual developments that challenged the underpinnings of the modern mentality. These earlier volleys prepared the way for the full-scale frontal assault against the fortress of modernity launched in the late twentieth century.¹

What intellectual developments led to the assault on modernity? The developments came in the form of skepticism. Ironically, the same rationalistic skepticism that had earlier laid the foundation for modernism provided the basis for its undoing.

From Reason to Experience

According to Stanley Grenz, the “first volley” against modernism’s rationalistic worldview came from Friedrich Nietzsche.² Nietzsche rejected the Enlightenment ideal that truth could be discovered through the faculty of human reason alone. Grenz describes what Nietzsche believed when he writes, “we do not possess a faculty of reason that can know explicate ultimate truth apart from life.”³ This idea augmented experience to the place where it became more important than reason in the discovery of truth. Middleton and Walsh describe the role of experience in understanding reality in terms of the fact that, “we simply have no access to something called ‘reality’ apart from the way in which we represent that reality in our concepts, language and discourse.”⁴ Gone was the idea that, through reason, one overarching truth could be discovered. Instead, reality was understood as being shaped and discovered through interaction with life itself.

¹ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 84.

² Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 88.

³ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 95.

⁴ Middleton and Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be*, 32.

From Natural Law to Mystery

Modernism constructed a framework for viewing the world based on laws that were part of nature, but what about phenomena that could not be explained? Modernism responded to this question by asserting that the answer simply had not yet been discovered. Through the implementation of our rational minds and scientific methods, we could one day uncover all mysteries. Unfortunately, there are some dimensions of life—human spirituality for example—that may never be fully understood by using science and the laws of nature.

Postmodern culture, on the other hand, allows room for mystery. Whereas modernism sought to remove mystery through discovering rational solutions and material explanations, most Postmoderns would rather have questions than answers. Postmoderns have become comfortable with mystery. Reggie McNeal challenges the Western Church to be open to mystery when he writes, “Only when something goes on in church that can be explained as a God-thing will a spiritually fascinated culture pause and take notice.”⁵ Postmoderns are not only comfortable with mystery, they are on a quest to find it.

From Autonomy to Community

The ivory tower thinkers of the Enlightenment themselves came under suspicion from those who questioned the principle of autonomy. Middleton and Walsh write,

Rather than perpetuating the myth of the autonomous, self-constituting subject, Michel Foucault says that the modernist subject must be ‘stripped of its creative role and analyzed as a complex and variable function of discourse.’ In this postmodern appraisal, language is more a producer of subjectivity than a meaningful product of autonomous subjects.⁶

⁵ McNeal, *A Work of Heart*, 81.

⁶ Middleton and Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be*, 50.

While Foucault challenged the ability of autonomous humanity to produce objective truth, another postmodern philosopher, Richard Rorty, has focused his attention on the heightened role of another subject—community. Rorty writes, “In the end, the pragmatists tell us, what matters is our loyalty to other human beings clinging together against the dark, not our hope of getting things right.”⁷ The role of individual objectivity has largely collapsed against the postmodern emphasis on community. Since universal truth could no longer be pursued, according to postmodern philosophers, focus has shifted from the search for that truth to a quest for understanding the role of community in shaping individuals and culture alike.

From Harmony to Diversity

Middleton and Walsh accurately summarize the move from the one, harmonious ideal of modernism to the diverse pluralism of postmodernity:

The carnivalesque, pluralistic culture in which we live can be seen as a consequence of the breakdown of modernity (which touted itself as the ‘greatest show on earth’) combined with a recognition of the socially constructed character of reality. Since the old construction has been discredited and is in a process of decomposition, the season is open on the construction of new realities which are produced with the same speed and ease with which temporary circus tents are raised.⁸

The emerging postmodern realities are diverse. They represent a cacophony of options with no common ties to bring them together in a neat and tidy worldview package. The challenge for postmoderns is no longer learning how to conform to the singular, harmonious ideal offered by modernism. Rather, the challenge consists of choosing which ideal is best suited to the individual or group in question. David Lyon describes

⁷ Richard Rorty, “Pragmatism,” in *The Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 166. Quoted in Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 157.

⁸ Middleton and Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be*, 42-43.

the widespread challenge created by the tendency of intellectual pluralism to foster syncretism, whereby each subject creates his or her own patchwork quilt of conviction out of concepts and principles that would previously have seemed inconsistent, conflicting, even irreconcilable:

Syncretism, previously a problem peculiar to certain intellectual and theological settings, is now generalized and popularized, in practice as in belief. New possibilities emerge, creating liturgical smorgasbords, doctrinal potlucks. As the sacred canopy recedes and the floating signs multiply, the problem becomes less ‘how do I conform?’ and more ‘how do I choose?’⁹

Postmoderns contend that true understanding emerges out of considering a diversity of viewpoints and perspectives. In considering a particular problem or concern, there is not always a single solution but a variety of choices that are equally good and right.

From Confidence to Skepticism Regarding Human Progress

The prospect of human progress began to crumble in the twentieth century. David Lyon writes, “Faith in progress flickered following a second World War only to be revived artificially by massive scientific and technological development and an unprecedented consumer boom. But the damage was done.”¹⁰ Even by the middle of the twentieth century, the Western world had become disillusioned and skeptical of the notion that human progress was ushering in a modern utopia.

Postmodernism emerged largely because the modern utopia was never established. The answers offered by modernists were rejected as people began to question foundational Enlightenment principles. David Lyon writes, “The question of postmodernity offers an opportunity to reappraise modernity, to read the signs of the

⁹ David Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times*, (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2000), 43.

¹⁰ Lyon, *Postmodernity*, 6.

times as indicators that modernity itself is unstable and unpredictable, and to forsake the foreclosed future that it once seemed to promise.”¹¹ This statement summarizes the skeptical attitude that characterizes postmodern culture. Postmoderns are skeptical about any singular claim that asserts itself as the only path to a better future. Middleton and Walsh identify the reason for this skepticism when they write, “the grand narrative of Western progress, like all grand narratives, results in the devaluation and suppression of other stories.”¹² When other stories are suppressed and devalued, then diverse voices, alternative perspectives and solutions are no longer heard. Central to postmodernism is the importance of listening to these diverse voices, stories and perspectives. So, any story that claims a greater value than others is viewed skeptically.

Interpreting the Small Group’s Actions at First Modernist Church using Postmodern Principles

The postmodern principles developed in the previous section of this thesis formed the basis for the actions of the small group who organized the auction at First Modernist Church. While both modernist and postmodern groups shared a common faith and church community, they differed in their perspectives and ways of communicating those perspectives. The following section of this thesis will examine the priorities and perspectives of the small group. While their core values and beliefs may have been similar to the Elders, the ways those values and priorities were communicated differed significantly. As was the case in the previous chapter, the small group’s priorities and methods of communicating is generalized and may not be a perfect representation of how every postmodern might react in similar situations. It is only meant to illustrate the

¹¹ Lyon, *Postmodernity*, 70.

¹² Middleton and Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be*, 72.

fundamental differences in how the modernist-minded church leaders and the postmodern oriented small group at First Modernist Church communicated their priorities.

Reality Informs Reason

The emergence of postmodernism has called into question the modernist tendency to rely on reason alone to discover truth. Life experience has become a new prerequisite in the formation of truth. Life can no longer be assessed through isolated observation, since observation itself demands participation in the events being assessed. Any attempt to form an understanding or judgment about an event would be inaccurate apart from personal participation.

The small group at First Modernist Church relied on their experience in formulating a belief that God's kingdom was enlarged because of the auction. In forming that belief, we looked at the auction itself and the list of positive things that came out of it: a family was given much needed financial and community support, the lines were blurred between believers and unbelievers as unchurched friends joined in helping, everyone present enjoyed great food, many went home with new wares at great prices, and people had a great time. When we examined our experience against the Scriptural principle, "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Matt. 22:39), we had no doubt that God was pleased.

This was a radically different reaction than that of the Elders. They approached the auction event without having experienced it. Since none of them were present, the basis of their conclusions would have to be drawn from the experiences of those who had attended. Yet sadly, the congregants who had written the letters stating their discomfort with the auction had not attended either. That left the experiences of those who had

attended and had participated in the auction that evening. But the experiences of the people who attended the auction were never taken into consideration. As one who tends to see the world through a postmodern lens, I struggle with how the Elders were able to wrestle through auction conflict without ever having consulted anyone who had participated in it. The Elders concluded that the idea of an auction was counter-biblical. They based their position on Mark 11:15-17:

On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"¹³

Their decision was based primarily on a rationalistic approach to interpreting Mark 11:15-17 that informed how they should live, rather than using their experience to frame their interpretation of the text and give it a fuller and richer meaning.

Modernists tend to rely heavily on reason. Conclusions are often drawn based on rationalism, leaving little or no room for experience. This was one reason why the Elders felt comfortable with their decision to judge the auction as incongruent with scriptural truth without knowing first hand details of what actually transpired.

The Conversational Community

There is a need for both individualism fostered by modernism and the community nurtured by postmodernism. Jesus was constantly calling attention to the value of individuals, particularly those who were societal rejects. Yet he was also consistent in his emphasis on drawing people into the larger community that he called, "the Kingdom of

¹³ Even though the Elders approached this text from a rationalistic perspective they failed to wrestle with the context of the passage. Rationalistic is not the same as reasonable. Those who adhere to a rationalistic approach to life can still be irrational at times.

God.” Individualism and community are biblical ideals, but are they on the hearts and minds of Canadians?

Reginald Bibby polled Canadians to determine their highest values. He writes, “Invariably they place the greatest importance on freedom and relationships, along with privacy and, of course, a comfortable life.”¹⁴ Canadians value privacy and relationships. Are both possible to obtain? Reggie McNeal echoes Bibby’s findings when he writes:

The advent of air conditioning and the rise of crime in the second half of the twentieth century exiled people from the streets and into their fortified homes. All of these factors, and many more, have created a culture characterized by isolation. Many people express a growing sense that they need to belong to someone. This generation particularly values community.¹⁵

It appears as though postmodernism juxtaposes isolation and community, holding them in a delicate balance. The individualism of modernism has resulted in isolated postmoderns. While postmoderns value the comfort of private lifestyles and struggle with the loneliness of isolation, they also long for community and relationships.

While First Modernist Church’s leaders deliberated around the autonomous boardroom table, the postmodern small group met for conversation around another table—the communion table. While we did share in the Lord’s Supper, the communion table that I am referring to fostered communal conversation. The World Book Dictionary defines communion in this way: “1.a. ‘the act of sharing; having in common; participation.’ 2. ‘exchange of thoughts and feelings; intimate talk; fellowship.’”¹⁶ In the small group, communion often meant sharing conversation and coffee, and celebrating

¹⁴ Bibby, *Restless Gods*, 203.

¹⁵ I am surprised McNeal has not included the internet as another reason people are connecting less and less in the flesh. In my opinion, it has done more to foster isolation, even between family members living under the same roof, than any other factor. McNeal, *A Work of Heart*, 85.

¹⁶ *The World Book Dictionary* (1973), s.v. “communion.”

God together. There were many ways we created space for community and conversation. Some of the most important components of building community in our small group were that once a month we brought food and ate supper together before our small group gathering; we hosted town hall meetings quarterly;¹⁷ we took time to divide into smaller groups to tell stories and ask questions; and we even shared in Communion¹⁸ (the Lord's Supper) while sitting at round tables. The small group was intentional about fostering community in every aspect of their corporate gatherings. It was out of a communal brainstorming session among the small group that the idea for an auction to help the young family first surfaced.

By comparison, the church leaders, having been duly elected and appointed to their positions by the congregation, met in isolation to make decisions that would affect the lives of people outside the boardroom. The small group, on the other hand, sought to empower one another through conversation. While neither framework is necessarily good or bad, one was limited in the amount of creative energy it could produce. The Elders had to rely on one another since many of their decisions were private and confidential. Therefore, they together had to carry those burdens. The small group however, was able to spread the decision-making around, empowering one another to come up with the best solution to helping the young family. One group asked the community to accept their decisions while the other group sought to accept their community and asked them for help. One group was strengthened by their autonomy,

¹⁷ Town hall meetings were gatherings where we opened up the floor for questions from those who gathered. Anyone, from the church or community, could come and ask questions, make suggestions or share ideas. It helped those of us who were small group regulars to stay alert to the thoughts and needs of the broader community.

¹⁸ The case of the 'C' is important. The World Book Dictionary defines "Communion" as, "1. 'the act of sharing in the Lord's Supper as a part of church worship; Holy Communion.'" *The World Book Dictionary* (1973), s.v. "Communion."

given by the larger community, while the other group was strengthened by their communal processes.

The small group was not only confused by the Elders' scriptural exegesis but also about the rationale behind asking me to apologize publicly. The Elders' appointed positions gave them the right to make the decision autonomously. But the small group thought that was crazy. The group believed that the basis of building community is through conversation. They also believed that God's Spirit spoke most clearly in and through the whole body of Christ. In the words of Simon Chan, "The real leader is Christ, the head who communicates his will to the entire body, not just to a special class of leaders."¹⁹ So, for the Elders to ask a member of the small group to make a public apology without sitting down to talk with the small group was perceived to be an intentional usurpation of power.

The Beauty of Diversity

Postmodernism is comfortable with a plethora of diverse perspectives. Whereas modernity emphasized that society was moving toward one harmonious ideal, void of pre-Enlightenment pitfalls, postmodernism is most at home in the plurality of diverse ideas, backgrounds and perspectives.

Diversity in Participants

The small group of postmoderns at First Modernist Church was an eclectic community. They were a blended group of people from different generations, social classes and backgrounds. When they set out to organize the auction, they never thought

¹⁹ Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 210.

about how inviting a non-Christian auctioneer or accepting corporate donations for the bidding table would affect Christian “purity” at First Modernist Church. They were comfortable with being inclusive of people who were different that the members of First Modernist Church.

The small group itself had been viewed skeptically by the Elders for quite a while leading up to the auction. To better understand the Elders’ skepticism, I will briefly describe how the group differed in their approach to community participation and worship.

The group of people represented in the small group was a small scale version of the surrounding community.²⁰ The small group met weekly in the church gym in something of a coffee house style of gathering. There was music, dim lights, good coffee, crayons for doodling, and opportunities for discussion. The public was invited to attend through personal invitations and community flyers. There were regulars, those who were casual attendees, and those who participated until they were offended and left: most of them cited some form of experimental spiritual exercise that was outside their comfort zone as their reason for leaving. The small group regulars were as follows: a retired highschool geography teacher and his wife who relied on her cane more than I rely on good coffee; a young, unmarried couple who lived together, without a phone, in a room that was smaller than some of the church’s custodial closets; a recently widowed woman and her adult daughter; a young family whose newly born child was the reason the auction was held; a single woman who brought me, the pastor, a one-year-supply of

²⁰ First Modernist Church’s community was very homogeneous. Most of the people who lived there had grown up in the local neighbourhood. Therefore, those who were represented in the small group were all from the same ethnic background.

produce whenever she could make it in from her farm;²¹ a few teens who were connected to the church's youth ministry; and a marriage and family therapist who had completed multiple masters' degrees, her computer savvy husband and their three brilliant, highly committed and extraordinarily creative teenage daughters.

In addition to the regulars at our small group there were others: a man who drove taxi, lived in a low income housing unit, and prayed with everyone who would let him; a nearly retired anesthetist and his wife; and a middle aged woman with her teenage daughter whose husband had recently left her for another woman.

These were the main participants in the postmodern small group at First Modernist Church. What made this group unique from any other group at the church was its eclectic nature. There was very little that the single woman who tithed her produce had in common with the retired high school teacher, yet when we gathered the focus was not on what made us different. The focus was on listening to one another and discovering the voice of God together, in community. Not only was the community itself diverse, the ways we approached God were also diverse.

Diversity in Spiritual Formation

Our community experiences were as varied as the people who participated in the small group. For that reason some people at First Modernist Church, including a majority of church leaders, became skeptical of the small group. The greatest controversy was created because the small group began to dabble in some ancient practices. Our controversial practices included: a trip as a community to a retreat centre where we

²¹ Not only did she bring vegetables, a few times she brought a portion of the money she received for selling one of her cows. When I asked her why she had not given the money to the church she noted that this was above and beyond. She cited an Old Testament reference about giving a portion of her 'first fruits' to the priest.

walked a prayer labyrinth, participation in a guided meditation based on Richard Foster's description in *Celebration of Discipline*,²² using *Lectio Divina* as an exercise in community spiritual formation, a meditation on Rembrandt's painting of the Prodigal Son, and communion that was served by the small group regulars to those gathered around the tables.²³ Each of these practices created space for the small group community to hear from God. Robert Webber writes:

Younger evangelicals desire a piety that has the force of tradition behind it, a piety that is communal and participated in by Christians always and everywhere, a piety characterized by structure and freedom. They are finding this kind of spirituality in the ancient, more enduring forms of piety discarded by the modern innovative boomer leaders.²⁴

While many of the postmodern small group's spiritual exercises were rooted in ancient tradition, their efforts to build community were neither ancient nor modern. They simply relied on good coffee and conversation to cultivate relationships with a diverse group of people using diverse spiritual practices.

The Progression toward Authenticity

Modernism's vision of progress created an environment where failures were quickly hidden and replaced with a "success only" façade. Mistakes and failures could not be tolerated when society, culture, and human kind were improving. Yet one major setback surfaced in postmodernism: most people can relate better to failures and mistakes than they can to the success the elite seem to enjoy. Whereas modernism proclaimed the

²² For a description of this meditation see Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, rev ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999), 38-39.

²³ When we served the Lord's Supper it was always done around a table. We would eat the bread and drink the wine (in our case it was grape juice) while looking into the faces of those at our table. Afterwards we always created space for conversation, prayer or personal reflection.

²⁴ Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 185.

triumphs of progressing toward perfection, postmodernism is more comfortable with something else—skepticism about human progress. While postmoderns often become trapped in a spiral toward hopelessness, when skepticism is harnessed and directed toward positive ends it can manifest itself as authenticity: being genuinely vulnerable about one’s strengths and weaknesses. People living in a postmodern culture are looking for real people who will be honest about their struggles and mistakes. Middleton and Walsh illustrate this shift in perspective when they describe the words of a prominent musician:

So it is not surprising that a sensitive artist like Peter Gabriel chronicles this loss of modernist self-confidence in his song ‘Blood of Eden.’ When this postmodern man catches a sight of his own reflection, he no longer sees the Promethean hero of modernity. Rather, Gabriel tells us, ‘I saw the signs of my undoing.’ In a similar way to Bruce Cockburn, who says that he needs a miracle ‘to keep this little thread from snapping,’ Gabriel describes the darkness of his heart.²⁵

The signs of undoing, to use Gabriel’s words, are evident not only in individual lives but also within the church community.

Authenticity in the Church

I learned one of my most important leadership lessons at First Modernist Church. As previously mentioned, I was invited to apologize for allowing the auction to take place at the church. The Elders decided to cover the auction mistake by having me publicly apologize. They believed the church should be a place of excellence, a place where the surrounding community could see God’s holiness in the lives of His people. Since the auction went against this ideal, “atonement” had to be made. After challenging the Elders’ auction disapproval in the boardroom, I was willing to do what I could to

²⁵ Middleton and Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be*, 52.

mend broken fences. As I stood up on Sunday morning, following the boardroom decision, I wanted to approach the congregation with genuine honesty and an attitude of reconciliation. I apologized with humility and empathy for any offenses that may have been caused by the auction. The congregational response was shocking. After the worship service numerous people approached me, confused as to what could have offended people. The following week more letters were written. The end result was something that I perceived to be lacking in the church prior to the auction—authenticity.

Authenticity in Relating to God

Up until the apology, the comments that had been made, in letters and by the Elders, focused on one thing—defending God and His “perceived” standards for congregational discipleship. Those who were offended were quick to attack the small group by coming to God’s defense. Yet defending the God who created the universe does not require personal vulnerability and authenticity. In fact, it creates an approach to spirituality that is, precisely, defensive rather than being open to critique. When a group of people begin to defend one who needs no defense, they place themselves in a position of superiority. In seeking to defend God, the Elders accused and condemned the actions of the small group. But were these not the very people whom they, as leaders, were called to serve and love?

It is much easier to stand in defense of a principle or ideal than it is to drop one’s defenses and enter into self-examination and repentance. Simon Chan notes, “We are ill at ease until we are in full control, until we feel that we have a handle on things. We place ourselves in the center of things and keep God safely on the sidelines.”²⁶ It is

²⁶ Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 149.

relatively easy to maintain a façade and claim that it has been given by God. It is much harder to take an introspective journey asking whether one's life is genuinely being shaped by God.

Authenticity in Relating to People

Authenticity in relating to God favours, perhaps even fosters, authentic relationships with people. Whereas the Elders quickly went to God's defense, I decided to refrain from defending myself.²⁷ Rather, my apology was an attempt to build bridges between the small group and those who had been angered by the auction. My apology created an eruption of genuine connections between people in the congregation and the small group. At that moment I realized that people are attracted not to power and achievement, but to weakness, vulnerability and authenticity.

The modernist Western church has focused on trying to please God so much that they have neglected authenticity in relating to one another.²⁸ This is particularly evident among leaders. Henri Nouwen writes:

Confession and forgiveness are the concrete forms in which we sinful people love one another. Often I have the impression that priests and ministers are the least-confessing people in the Christian community. The sacrament of Confession has often become a way to keep our own vulnerability hidden from our community. Sins are mentioned and ritual words of forgiveness are spoken, but seldom does a real encounter take place in which the reconciling and healing presence of Jesus can be experienced. There is so much fear, so much distance, so much generalization and so little real listening, speaking, and absolving, that

²⁷ By retelling the events of my apology I do not intend in any way to make it seem like I was more spiritual or pious than the Elders or anyone at First Modernist Church. I did not realize at the time what later ramifications my apology was going to have. I simply attempted to walk in humility and obedience before God.

²⁸ I know this phrase sounds strange but it is precisely where I believe the Western church has faltered. Because of a belief that God is more pleased with good, upright people than He is with those who are not, it is hard to admit weakness and struggle for fear of being judged as unspiritual or unqualified to minister to others.

not much true sacramentality can be expected.²⁹

In order to maintain a position of spiritual maturity, many leaders are unable to disclose their own weaknesses. This is unfortunate since Jesus Christ himself has modeled vulnerability and weakness in leadership. The night Jesus was arrested He confessed to His three closest disciples, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me” (Matt. 26:38). Jesus’ example is a powerful reminder that weakness and authenticity are essential. One of the unexpected bonuses of this type of leadership is that postmoderns are drawn to people who live authentic lives. They are not very concerned with a leader’s status and holiness. They are interested in whether the leader can relate to their weakness and brokenness.

Postmoderns, both those who follow Christ and those who do not, are attracted to something more than kingdom-building churches; they long for authenticity. The auction was motivated by the young family’s tangible need. Instead of hiding it, the small group asked for help in the broader community. The community responded to the small group’s invitation by becoming co-labourers with the group in filling the need. David Hopkins states the postmodern desire for community in these words, “This next generation wants what anyone else would desire: the possibility to connect with the holiness of God in a loving community of honest people with the same hopes... This generation can see a sell-job from a mile away. Ultimately, they want the authentic.”³⁰ The community businesses and individuals donated auction items and many came to the auction itself. They were drawn to help, not because they wanted to advance the church’s cause, but

²⁹ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 46.

³⁰ David Hopkins, “The Deception of the X-treme Church,” *Next-Wave*, October 1999, <http://www.next-wave.org/oct99/Deception.htm>; accessed 1 December 2005.

because they saw a real need and recognized they could have a role in helping. The Western church's call is to become co-labours with their communities in helping people.

Summary

The emergence of postmodernism has created a radical shift away from the principles of the Enlightenment. Where the Enlightenment focused on reason, nature, autonomy, harmony and progress as the framework for understanding and operating in the world, postmodernism emphasizes the inconsistencies in the modern paradigm: there has been a shift from reason to experience, natural law (nature) to mystery, autonomy to community, harmony to diversity, and progress to skepticism.

Some churches have recognized the shift and are beginning to wrestle with what it means to be the church in a postmodern world. But many churches and their leadership teams continue to ignore or react against those with a postmodern mindset, as was the case at First Modernist Church. But, as the small group demonstrated, there are opportunities to learn and grow even in decidedly modernist churches. In fact, some of the best learning came from navigating the challenges of working through the conflict with the Elders at First Modernist Church.

The small group based their decisions and actions on personal experience. They used their experiences to inform their reasoning processes. It was the young family's need that propelled them to action. The family need was the reason for the auction. They gave little thought to whether an auction made rational sense in light of their modernist-minded church context. Where the Elders concluded that one biblical precept—a prohibition of commerce in the church—had been transgressed, the small group sought collectively to honour a greater principle—that of charity and help for the needy.

The small group was a conversational community. Since postmoderns crave community and Christ himself was constantly nurturing communal dialogue, the small group was intentional about making space for conversation. In that conversational space everyone had an equal voice. When decisions had to be made they were never hidden from the rest of those who gathered; they were always formed and developed in community. The auction was one such example.

One of the values of the small group was their desire for diversity. We welcomed those from different backgrounds and ages into our gathering. Everyone was encouraged to participate in creating a vision for the small group community, regardless of age, commitment to the small group or spiritual background. The process of spiritual formation was also diverse. The small group experimented with different exercises and rituals in their attempt to cultivate an authentic walk with God and each other.

Lastly, authenticity was the highest community ideal. This was the reason I chose to publicly apologize for any offense the auction may have caused. In the minds of the small group, progressing in spiritual formation meant cultivating authenticity with one another and with God. For the church leaders however, progression toward spiritual maturity meant sinning less and less. That was why they asked me to apologize. This demonstrates a fundamental difference in how postmodern-minded and modern-minded people see progress in spiritual maturity. For one it means greater authenticity; for the other it means living with fewer moral and personal failures.

The shift from the principles of modernism to postmodernism is creating a communication tension in the church. The modernist, Western church must change how it communicates, but how? Clearly many who operate from a modernist perspective still

hold prominent positions in church leadership; yet fewer and fewer people understand the typical modernist framework for communicating. More and more people are communicating from a postmodernist perspective. This has created an inherent tension, a growing divide. Can that divide be crossed? Are there ways to bridge the communication gap that separates moderns and postmoderns in the Western church? The following chapter will attempt to answer that question and perhaps create some new ones. It will lay a foundation for building bridges. It will introduce some necessary leadership components for those who want to lead between cultures rather than minister to only one group or the other. It will introduce some new moves that will be helpful in learning the postmodern dance.

THREE

LEADING IN THE POSTMODERN CHURCH: BRIDGE BUILDING BETWEEN THE MODERN AND THE POSTMODERN

Everyone who leads in a postmodern community will be forced to relate both to modernist and to postmodernist outlooks. There are no exclusively modernist or postmodernist churches. Just as Canadian culture is a mixture of both, so too is the Canadian church. As such, effective leaders in Canadian churches need to focus on developing the necessary skills for bridge building among people from various generations and worldviews. The purpose of this chapter will be to raise the issues that contribute to the modernist/postmodernist tension, both inside and outside the church. Suggestions will also be proposed for churches that are interested in bridging the cultural divide.

Henri Nouwen offers some helpful advice for churches that are moving forward into the uncharted territory of postmodernism. Although this excerpt was not originally written to describe a church's journey from the modern to the postmodern, his description of the "new country" is nonetheless helpful and deeply prophetic:

Now you have come to realize that you must leave [the old country], where your Beloved dwells. You know that what helped and guided you in the old country no longer works, but what else do you have to go by? You are being asked to trust that you will find what you need in the new country. That requires the death of what has become so precious to you: influence, success, yes, even affection and praise.

Trust is so hard, since you have nothing to fall back on. Still, trust is what is essential. The new country is where you are called to go, and the only way to go there is naked and vulnerable.

It seems that you keep crossing and recrossing the border. For a while you experience a real joy in the new country. But then you feel afraid and start longing again for all you left behind, so you go back to the old country. To your dismay, you discover that the old country has lost its charm. Risk a few more steps into the new country, trusting that each time you enter it, you will feel more comfortable and be able to stay longer.¹

Nouwen's description of the tension between the old and new country bears a strong resemblance to the tension that exists between the modernist and the postmodern. It is not that the old/modernist is necessarily bad and the new/postmodern, good; rather the focus should be on the transition from one phase to the other. It is similar to puberty, the stage that lies between childhood and adult life. Puberty is a liminal experience.² It is brief in comparison to the rest of life, yet it is essential to the healthy growth and development of every human being.

The Canadian church is encountering a liminal experience; it exists between the modern and the postmodern. Liminality is creating great challenges for congregational leaders and parishioners alike. Alan Roxburgh illustrates this challenging stage for churches when he states:

Liminality, as a threshold experience, places a group in a place of confusion. The state of betwixt-and-between is like death and loss. The impulse is to find a road back to the old life. The potential for transformation and renewal is limited. In comparison with its former social state, the liminal group is in an unstructured state. Old rules no longer apply; they simply will not work. Because of this fact, liminality becomes a place of undefined potential.³

The postmodern shift has positioned the Canadian church in a "place of undefined

¹ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Inner Voice of Love: A Journey Through Anguish to Freedom* (New York: Image, 1998), 21-22.

² "Liminality is a term that describes the transition process accompanying a change of state or social position.... Originally, liminality was applied to rites of passage processes in preindustrial cultures." Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership and Liminality*, 23-24.

³ Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership, and Liminality*, 32.

potential”. But before that potential can be tapped there are some challenges that must be faced. Just as puberty sends adolescents into a temporary state of chaos and change, so postmodernism has created cultural and ecclesiastical upheaval. Change often creates chaos and the church’s liminal experience could be accurately described as chaotic and tense. Yet, there is hope within and beyond this pivotal liminal stage.

Just as the church’s liminal experience is a pivotal chapter in its life, so the current chapter plays a liminal role in framework of this thesis. Chapter one outlined the cultural shift created by the Enlightenment and its implications for the contemporary church. Chapter two outlined the shift currently taking place from modernism to postmodernism and its implications for the church. These shifts were illustrated by an example from my own life and ministry at a predominantly modernist-minded church that I am calling “First Modernist Church”.

Chapters four through eight will describe and delineate the characteristics necessary for a church leader to lead effectively in a postmodern setting. Those chapters will examine the leader’s necessary internal traits, but will say very little, if anything, about effective models. The modernist church has produced many good books, seminars, and conferences based around principles for successful models of “doing church” and church leadership. Yet, I believe many of those principles were based only loosely on a biblical framework and additionally they appealed to a modernist-minded culture. As such, they will prove to be ineffective in a postmodern context. Tom Sine summarizes the postmodern mentality when he writes, “Unlike many of the successful boomer churches of the nineties, postmodern churches are not interested in highly programmatic,

user-friendly models that can be replicated.”⁴ Postmoderns are looking for something more than three easy steps or five great principles. They are looking for things that can only be found in relationships. Therefore, each of the leader’s characteristics explored in the following chapters will be solely relational in nature. This is because relationships, rather than organizational structures, will be crucial for effective leadership in the postmodern church. Whereas people with a modernist-mindset were comfortable being guided by leaders who were rationalistic and led for a position of power and autonomy, postmoderns are interested in collaborating and participating with their leaders in an environment of equality.

This chapter is liminal because it stands at the threshold of a new perspective on church leadership. It describes the Canadian church’s current challenges in terms that every human teenager might understand—puberty. It bridges the gap between the description of where the church has been (chapters one and two) and how church leadership could evolve (chapters four to eight). The liminal traits described in this chapter are as follows: marginalization, rapid change, and a struggle to blend in. Not only are these traits embedded in oily-faced, teen bodies, they have also found their way to the heart of the Canadian church body. Regardless of whether it is viewed positively or negatively, the Canadian church has a choice: it can turn back toward the comfort offered by the ‘old country’ or it can embrace this stage called postmodernism. By choosing the latter it has a new opportunity to use this phase of life and growth to discover and articulate its place in the world.

⁴ Sine, *Mustard Seed Vs. McWorld*, 18.

The Marginalization of the Canadian Church

The Canadian church is at a crossroads. Christendom, in terms of its place within Canadian society as a whole, has ended and the church has been marginalized: it has been pushed into isolation. Gone are the days when Christianity was the dominant religious force in Canada. Don Posterski and Gary Nelson describe the quiet passing of Christendom in these words: “by the 1970’s, although very few people perceived it yet, Christendom in Canada was dead.”⁵ Today, the church is being marginalized; it is widely perceived as an outdated, irrelevant institution. It is seen as standing in the way of a progressive, liberal society.⁶ The church has been pushed from its comfortable place of cultural dominance to the margins of Canadian society.

Modernists tend to see marginalization as a difficult and disappointing transition. For them, entering the “new country” means moving from a place of cultural dominance to inferiority. Postmoderns, by contrast, see the transition differently. They are accustomed to living life as outsiders. They tend to be comfortable with a plurality of options and preferences so losing a place of cultural dominance seems fairer for everyone. In fact, for postmoderns, the margins are a more natural place for the church to be.

Today, the marginalized church has an opportunity. According to Alan Roxburgh, the liminal experience holds the potential for transformation: “For the church, experiencing its life as marginality, it is critical to understand that this is a passage with distinct phases, one of which is the potential for transformation.”⁷ During this time of

⁵ Posterski and Nelson, *Future Faith Churches*, 26.

⁶ Nowhere has this perception been more apparent than in the political realm where left wing politicians argue that standing against same-sex marriage is a violation of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

⁷ Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership, and Liminality*, 32-33.

displacement, the church must grapple with its identity, an identity that has become blurred by its position of religious dominance in the culture. I believe a marginalized church has a closer affinity to the New Testament church, where Christianity was viewed skeptically by the majority of society. Douglas John Hill, Professor Emeritus at McGill University writes:

The pluralistic situation is the *normal* situation of Christian faith if one takes the New Testament at face value. Every word of it was written in the knowledge that Christianity was one alternative in a sea of faith-possibilities and a small alternative at that! Part of the reason why we've been so standoffish vis-à-vis non-Christian faiths is that Christendom, over sixteen centuries, conditioned us to believe that 'the world' (at least the West!) was our missionary preserve; and our link with imperial peoples from Rome to America has underlined that assumption. Why should we bother with the others? We had *a priori* knowledge of their inferiority!⁸

The Canadian church became comfortable in its place of superiority. Inter-religious dialogue and listening to those with different perceptions was not necessary when the church was culturally dominant. But in the marginalized church there are new calls for conversation, conversation about cultural transformation in particular. A marginalized church has an opportunity to transform culture by doing something that it could not do from a position of cultural power: it can relate to other marginalized groups; as a peer and a friend, inviting others into their journey with Christ.

Not only does the church have an opportunity to relate to other culturally marginalized groups, the margins hold the potential for a transformational encounter with God. Alan Roxburgh equates the current liminal stage of the Western church to the Old

⁸ Douglas John Hill, "Moving Beyond the Haze of Christendom: Response to David Kettle," *The Gospel and Our Culture: A Network for Encouraging the Encounter in North America* 14, no. 1 (March 2002): 3-4.

Testament Exodus journey. He sees the potential within both groups to connect deeply with the sacred:

The margins, therefore, become the place most characterized by the sacred. The noumenal comes very near. In biblical literature this is seen in the early stages of Israel's wandering in the wilderness, a liminal experience characterized by an intense sense of the sacred. The liminal provides opportunity for renewed and intensified relationship with God.⁹

Having lost its social and political power, the church must now return to its original and true source of identity—God! In its powerlessness, the church can be rebuked and inspired by Jesus' mission statement, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to *the poor*. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for *the prisoners* and recovery of sight for *the blind*, to release *the oppressed*, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19 *italics mine*). Even as Jesus' ministry was directed primarily toward the marginalized, the politically powerless church can find itself embedded within another segment of society—the culturally marginalized. Yet it is precisely in that place of weakness that the church will find its greatest ministry power. Only when the church embraces its state of marginalization will we be able to identify with others who are marginalized, not for sociological or sympathetic reasons, but because we ourselves find God's compassion and concern where it is needed most, in the margins. This seemingly new opportunity is actually an ancient calling, fully demonstrated by Jesus Christ. Tom Sine writes:

In the first century you were expected to commit your life not only to God but to the purposes of God as well. As followers of Jesus, you no longer settled for having the dominant culture define the focus of your life. You were expected to make Jesus' vocation—"sight to the blind, release to the captives and good news to the poor"—your vocation.¹⁰

⁹ Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership, and Liminality*, 31.

¹⁰ Sine, *Mustard Seed Vs. McWorld*, 195.

The church can never fully understand, relate to, and minister to the marginalized until it too has become marginalized.

How can the Canadian church—with both modernist and postmodernist believers—move forward? Each views the church’s marginalization differently: the modernists see it negatively while postmodernists see it positively. I propose this solution: for the church living in the modernist/postmodernist tension, the postmodernists will need to lead the way into the “new country” of marginality. They, after all, understand the positive ramifications of life in the margins. Watching and learning from their example is the most effective way of helping the modernist Christians to surrender their vision of a culturally powerful church. And together they will be able to move forward, unified by life on the margins.

The Rapidly Changing Nature of the Canadian Church

Life’s transitional phases always create substantial turmoil and are often accompanied by rapid change; this describes the Western church’s experience. Understanding the changes currently occurring in the Western church will be critical for postmodern leaders. Whereas the preceding section dealt with the church’s relationship with culture, this section will examine the internal dynamics of the Canadian church itself.

The Church’s Generational Tension

The Western church’s greatest internal tension is in managing the growing divide between generations. As the example of First Modernist Church demonstrated, the majority of Canadian churches are led by people who operate from a predominantly

modernist-mindset. At the same time, many people with a postmodern perspective are an active part of those same churches. The result is a constant tension.

The temptation for many postmoderns is to abandon established local churches and start new ones, churches characterized by fresh creativity and youthful cultural relevance, the result of which is an absence of gray and white heads. Yet this trend has dangerous, long-term implications. I believe that the church will miss part of its unique identity and witness in the world if it lacks an intergenerational flavour.

In referring to the emerging generation, Robert Webber writes:

The younger evangelicals desire to be around their parents and grandparents, and their dislike of being separated into their own group runs counter to the advice given by church-growth movements. That the way to grow a church is to target generations. Today's younger people seek out intergenerational communities where they mix and form relationships with all ages.¹¹

According to David Lyon, the modernist church has been modeled after “the limited company”,¹² with its emphasis on marketing spirituality and community based on group similarity. But postmoderns typically break down the divisions that separated people into distinctive sets of age—and interest—groups, even distinctive ministries. They long for authentic community that moves beyond mixing with their peers into a place where ninety-year-olds can learn from nine year olds and vice versa.

Yet for this transition to occur, people must be willing to listen to each other. Listening is the only defense against an “us-versus-them” mentality, a perception that has become commonplace in many churches. Robert Nash calls this mentality, “the sin of exclusion.”¹³ Nash writes that this outlook extends beyond simply a generational

¹¹ Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals*, 52.

¹² “Churches in modern, bureaucratic guise were clearly influenced by the dominant mode of organization, the limited company.” Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland*, 139.

¹³ Nash, *An 8-Track Church in a CD World*, 43.

exclusion to the exclusion of those who are religiously, theologically and culturally different as well.

Typically, those who are older lead the church; their preferences dominate the church's direction, look and feel. Those who are younger however, often have different preferences and different church ideals. The younger group makes attempts to bring change into the congregation, often with limited success. If they are successful however, the older segment of the congregation begins to resent those who have disrupted the life of their church. This cycle can go on and on until a compromise is reached and both groups agree to live with an awkward tension. This is usually a best case scenario. A less than ideal situation could involve whole segments of a church leaving in anger and frustration.

For the Canadian church to bridge the intergenerational gap it must be willing to "do church" differently. When church is seen as a gathering of people on a Sunday morning or as an organizational framework of various ministries, the opportunity to interact with other generations will be limited. Church cannot be programmed. It cannot be produced. It can only take place spontaneously.

Eat, Drink and Be Merry

A meal is the best place for intergenerational interaction and ministry to take place. Doug Pagitt, pastor of Solomon's Porch, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, explains the communal effect offered by sharing a meal:

The intimacy of eating a meal together puts unreconciled relationships in a different context. You can't pass the salad dressing without looking at the other person. You can't ignore the other as you squeeze past on your way to

your chair or hand over your dirty plate. It's hard to maintain the separated individualistic mentality of isolation when you're sharing a meal.¹⁴

Whatever differences emerge because of worldview differences, and the complexity of communicating with those who operate with different philosophical frameworks, can be faced at the supper table. Using a meal as a place to build community and cohesion within a group is not a new idea: it was standard practice for Jesus. He used the meal to teach His disciples the priority of service in His kingdom (John 13:2-17).¹⁵ Jesus was a guest in the homes of sinners and used the meal as a vehicle of reconciliation and intimacy (Matt. 9:9-13). When he ate with the Pharisees he used table fellowship as an opportunity to call them to embrace His radical, upside-down kingdom (Luke 7:36-50). Jesus used the communion table as a way to bridge the cultural and socio-economic gaps that existed between people. The gaps that divided people in Jesus' day still divide people today. Yet congregational division in the twenty-first century is rarely bridged using Jesus' methods.

Along with using the meal as medium of reconciliation, the communion table also holds the potential to be more than a moment of personal reflection: the Lord's Supper could be offered as a means of leveling intergenerational tensions in the church. Andy Crouch proposes the Lord's Supper as a call to simplicity: "The communion table levels those of different economic means—poor and rich get the same portion. It effaces our carefully cultivated tastes—there is no menu, no list of options, no 'good, better, best!'

¹⁴ Doug Pagitt, *Reimagining Spiritual Formation: A Week in the Life of an Experimental Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 104.

¹⁵ This is a reference to the last supper. Not only does Jesus teach his disciples about service but He also uses this meal to comfort, encourage and pray for his disciples before his execution. It was this meal that became the model for the Lord's Supper that Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. It is interesting that Paul addresses division as the primary issue in this passage. Clearly, the Corinthians had neglected the spirit of the communion meal in favour of personal interests.

hierarchy of products.”¹⁶ If the generational gap between the modernist and the postmodern is going to be bridged in the Canadian church, then the intergenerational meal and the Lord’s Supper must be given primacy in the community.

The Canadian Church as a Cultural Chameleon

The Canadian church’s current liminal state has fostered an identity crisis. The tendency of many postmodernist Christians is, all too quickly, embracing a dangerous practice: sanctifying every element of postmodernism as good. This is not only a personal struggle, it can also be seen in many churches; tradition is tossed out and rejected in favour of an “everything goes, as long as it’s postmodern” mentality. In these contexts the church flutters from one doctrine and practice to the next, as a butterfly moves from flower to flower, floating wherever the winds of change might take it. But when the postmodern church is carried by the pluralistic culture of postmodernism, it runs the risk of becoming permanently de-centered. Erwin McManus asks some provocative questions and makes some insightful statements as he describes the plight of the Western church:

Without realizing it we have slipped into the view that the world creates culture and that the church reacts to it. In our most innovative moments we analyze cultural trends and project historical movements. Then like a twig determined to stop a tsunami, we brace ourselves for the future. But is it possible that the church was intended to be the cultural epicenter from which a new community emerges, astonishing and transforming cultures through the power of forgiveness, freedom, and creativity? Have we overestimated the effectiveness of methods, programs, and structures and underestimated the transforming essence of faith, love, and hope?¹⁷

When the church’s priority is an appeal to people, rather than to the living God, the

¹⁶ Crouch, *The Church in Emerging Culture*, 89.

¹⁷ Erwin McManus, *The Church in Emerging Culture*, 246.

church loses its opportunity to nurture a counter-cultural community. Counter-cultural churches begin with Jesus Christ's call, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness..." (Matt. 6:33). When the church's priority is anything other than seeking God's kingdom, there will be little cultural transformation. Tom Sine rightly concludes, "I am convinced that one of the main reasons we [as Christians] are so much like the culture around us is that we have little to call people to."¹⁸ Calling people to seek God's kingdom is one way the church can discover its identity, invite people to embrace something much larger than themselves, and ensure the postmodern church is not fluttering from one cultural value to the next, in a effort to be relevant.

To be effective in postmodern society, the church must move from blending into the cultural background to standing out as a movement with a vision to transform cultural values. According to Tom Sine, the church has become domesticated as a result of its position of institutional power during modernism:

The contemporary church often is one of the strongest apologists for protecting the dominant values of modern culture and is uncomfortable with those who challenge these values...we have not only settled for a model of discipleship that ignores cultural transformation but also have accepted a model of the church that has too often chosen to silently sanction all the values of the dominant culture, unless they are blatantly immoral. And in the process we have become domesticated.¹⁹

Protecting the values of any culture, modern or postmodern, will render the Canadian church ineffective and inconsistent. But is there an alternative? Is there something that can be done to rediscover the transformative identity of the Western church? I believe there is. It begins with a fresh encounter with the scriptures.

¹⁸ Sine, *Mustard Seed Vs. McWorld*, 156.

¹⁹ Sine, *Mustard Seed Vs. McWorld*, 164.

Finding Mission and Meaning in the Biblical Text

The modernist, Western church has embraced the scientific method as their primary approach to interpreting scriptural truth. While this is a good approach, it sets the interpreter “outside” the biblical text. Summarizing the thoughts of Michael Polanyi, Lesslie Newbigin writes:

It is possible to undertake the most exhaustive and penetrating examination of the biblical text in a way which leaves one, so to say, outside it. The text is an object for examination, dissection, analysis, and interpretation from the standpoint of the scholar. This standpoint is normally that of the plausibility structure which reigns in her society. From this point of view she examines the text, but the text does not examine her.²⁰

This approach is taught in Bible Colleges and Seminaries, almost exclusively, as the best way to interpret Scripture. As a result, pastors and their parishioners adopt this form of interpretation for Bible studies and sermon preparation and preaching. I believe this interpretative approach is good and necessary in determining the meaning and context of biblical passages. But I also believe that when this method is used exclusively in a community, that community will not see themselves as part of the unfolding story of scripture. They will only ever perceive themselves to be outsiders in their interpretative journey.

God’s story must become the Canadian church’s story. The church must find its identity once again from within the biblical narrative. It must move from interpreting the biblical text from the outside to finding itself within God’s unfolding story. Lesslie Newbigin goes on to write:

Our proper relation to the Bible is not that we examine it from the outside, but we indwell it and from within it seek to understand and cope with what is out there. In other words, the Bible furnishes us with our plausibility

²⁰ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 98.

structure. This structure is in the form of a story.²¹

By finding itself in the historical narrative of God's redemptive work, the church can discover its identity through relating to the scriptural narrative. Walter Brueggemann describes what this means for the church, "The text is so powerful and compelling, so passionate and uncompromising in its anguish and hope, that it requires we submit our experience to it and thereby re-enter our experience on new terms, namely the terms of the text."²² The church must learn to be mastered by, rather than seeking mastery over the text. To be mastered by the text demands a different approach. Just as the members of the church must listen to one another to bridge the generational tension (see previous section), it must also listen to the text in order to discover its meaning and mission in this postmodern culture.

Lectio Divina – Supplementing a Scientific Approach to the Biblical Text

Lectio Divina is one way for the Canadian church to listen corporately to the biblical text. I propose Lectio Divina, not as a replacement for the scientific interpretative approach but as a supplement. It is not based on the interpretation and insights of only one person. It is a way of reading and responding to scripture that is particularly appealing to community-oriented modernists and postmodernists alike. It is an approach that Canadian churches can employ to unite both generations and worldviews while at the same time developing a corporate vision and mission.

²¹ Newbiggin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 98-99.

²² Walter Brueggemann, *To Pluck Up, to Tear Down: A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah 1–25* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Edinburgh: Handsel, 1987), 17. Quoted in Middleton and Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be*, 175.

Lectio Divina (“sacred reading”) is an ancient tradition, used as early as the fourth and fifth centuries.²³ It is a way of listening corporately to the scriptures by moving through four distinct phases: Lectio (reading), Meditatio (meditation), Oratio (prayer), and Contemplatio (contemplation).²⁴ Through Lectio Divina the listener responds to the spoken text and shares their experience with the rest of the community. This is different than a community hearing one person’s interpretation of a biblical text. In Lectio Divina all people are equal and all responses are validated and appreciated. As Henri Nouwen writes, “Listening together to the word can free us from our competition and rivalry and allow us to recognize our true identity as sons and daughters of the same loving God and brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ, and thus of each other.”²⁵ As the community begins to listen to the text they are enabled to discover and articulate their calling and mission collectively. While everyone’s responses are appreciated and validated, the communal nature of Lectio Divina allows the community to discern whether someone might be misinterpreting what Christ is saying. Just as a scientific approach to scriptural interpretation demands that the interpretation be measured against the whole of scripture, Lectio Divina demands that the community also weigh how individuals respond against the whole of Scripture. Lectio Divina is also an interpretative approach that practices the Apostle Paul’s concept of community discernment found in 1 Cor. 2:16, “But we have the mind of Christ.”

²³ Corinne Ware, *Connecting to God: Nurturing Spirituality through Small Groups* (London: Alban, 1997; reprint, 1998), 60.

²⁴ For a brief explanation and overview of Lectio Divina see, Luke Dysinger, “The Process of Lectio Divina,” *Accepting the Embrace of God: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*, <http://www.valyermo.com/ld-art.html>; accessed 21 December 2005.

²⁵ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Making All Things New: An Invitation to the Spiritual Life* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 86. Quoted in Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 116-117.

Lectio Divina also moves people from passively hearing biblical interpretation to interacting with the text itself. The interpretation is found directly within the story of the text. This demands a different approach to current models of preaching. Reacting to the preacher-as-superstar, modeled in many of today's evangelical churches, Simon Chan writes:

The independence of the preacher's authority is tied to a view of Scripture as an independently authoritative text (rather than as the bearer of the authoritative Word) that can exist apart from the community from which it arises. The church is prior to the Scripture, which only makes any real sense to the community when it is read as the text of the community.²⁶

Listening collectively to the story of scripture enables the church to discover its meaning and mission. It also allows the church to discover its identity as a transforming agent in the emerging postmodern culture.

Summary

The Canadian church is currently experiencing liminality; it is between modernism and postmodernism. As a result, churches are struggling to build bridges between people of differing worldviews and ideologies. Some churches have decided to cling to the remains of the Modern era: as a result, they have very little to offer those who are postmodern. Other churches have opted for cultural relevance by sanctifying postmodern values and trends: as a result, they have very little to offer those who long for tradition and heritage.

There is a "new country" on the Canadian religious horizon. But it will not resemble the Christian landscape of the past, as the church is forced to wrestle with issues

²⁶ Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 266.

it has not had to face since its inception: marginalization, rapid change, and cultural blending.

As the culture moves from modernism to postmodernism the church has become marginalized. This is a difficult concept for modernist Christians since they are used to living in an era where the church was politically and socially powerful. Yet, postmoderns recognize the opportunity marginalization creates for the church. Now, the church can minister to those who are cultural outsiders as an outsider itself. The church is no longer called to sanction the dominant values of the society. Instead, it can serve and embrace those who would otherwise be forgotten as one who can relate, on the same level.

The postmoderns will have to lead the way for this transition to be embraced by the modernist-minded people in the church. Since postmoderns have been used to living life in the margins, they have an opportunity to demonstrate the power and advantage of marginal living.

Not only is the Canadian church marginalized, it is also a rapidly changing entity. Just as puberty creates rapid and dramatic changes in the body, so the liminal experience of postmodernism has created rapid and dynamic changes in the body of the church. Change is necessary before entering the “new country” that lies beyond postmodernism; yet change is the very thing that threatens to fracture and destroy one of the most important aspects of the church’s DNA—its intergenerational flavour.

The church must learn to listen and respond to intergenerational conversations in its journey into postmodern culture. Instead of segregating congregational relationships into age-based categories, it must build bridges of understanding. These bridges are most effectively constructed using something found in every household—a meal. The meal

creates space for storytelling: with the Gospel as the hub around which all other stories find their meaning. The meal is the best place for intergenerational communication and the easiest place to forgive. It is the ideal place to start when building bridges between generations in a rapidly changing church.

Finally, the Canadian church has become a cultural chameleon. It has become domesticated, failing to be an effective cultural transformer. In response, the church needs a fresh encounter with the scriptures. It must listen communally to the story found in the biblical text and find itself in that story.²⁷ It is there that the church will recover its meaning and mission in this postmodern culture.

One of the methods of listening to scripture that is needed is *Lectio Divina*. Through this corporate experience the church can listen to the voice of the body without having to rely exclusively on one personality or a group of spiritual elites to formulate a way forward. As the church begins to develop its meaning in community, it will be better equipped and prepared to fulfill its mission as a culture-creator.

The “new country” awaits the Canadian church. It also awaits a new type of leader. Postmodern leaders will need to be sensitive to this liminal stage of the church: a de-centering stage between modernism and postmodernism. The focus of this chapter has been on defining and explaining the church’s uniquely liminal characteristics. The following chapters will focus on the characteristics of a postmodern leader, characteristics that will be essential for anyone called to lead in the “new country” of postmodernism.

²⁷ Chapter four will provide examples of what it means for the church to do this.

FOUR

THE EXPERIENTIAL LEADER: USING STORIES, LEARNING AND TECHNOLOGY TO BUILD COMMUNITY

Church leaders who recognize and embrace the unique advantages of participatory and experiential leadership will thrive in postmodern contexts. Whereas modernism emphasized intellectual change as the means to discipleship, postmodernism relies strongly on experience as a means of discovering truth and reality. Therefore, postmodern leaders can add a new discipleship tool to their largely reason-based resources—experience. In the book, *A New Kind of Christian*, Neo explains the experiential dance of evangelism to his friend Dan:

“Instead of conquest, instead of a coercive rational argument or an emotionally intimidating sales pitch or an imposing crusade or an aggressive debating contest where we hope to ‘win’ them to Christ, I think of it like a dance. You know, in a dance, nobody wins and nobody loses. Both parties listen to the music and try to move with it. In this case, I hear the music of the gospel, and my friend doesn’t, so I try to help him hear it and move with it.”¹

Just as postmodern evangelism’s aim is to move from the “decision” to accept Christ to the “dance” of moving in the rhythm of Christ, so postmodern leadership’s aim must move from imparting knowledge to motivating people to participate.

In each of the following chapters, postmodern church leadership characteristics will be suggested and examined. There will be significant overlap between each characteristic since personality traits are fluid and not easily compartmentalized. For example, the focus of chapter six will be collaborative leadership, yet since collaborative

¹ McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian*, 62.

leadership is experiential leadership, both must work together when leading postmoderns. To avoid overlap and duplication I will focus on only one small area of experiential leadership in this chapter. This chapter's focus will be on examining ways that a church leader might approach discipleship experientially. This will be accomplished by examining three ideas for developing community in a postmodern context: the use of narrative, an emphasis on learning rather than teaching, and the use of technology and new forms of communication.²

The rationalism of modernism was fostered by emphasizing autonomy as a means of discovering truth. This can be seen in Decartes famous statement, “*I think, therefore I am*” (Italics mine). It was Decartes’ autonomy that allowed him to arrive at his conclusion. But the rationalistic and autonomous approach of modernism is being challenged by postmodernism’s emphasis on experience. Experience, rather than pure rationalism, is becoming increasingly important in community building.

Story and Community

Everyone loves a good story. A good story crosses generational, ethnic and language boundaries to offer a life experience that could be transformational. But story is a broad term. Therefore, it must be defined before examining its impact on community. Middleton and Walsh propose a helpful way of dividing the term story into two parts. They explain:

On the one hand, *story* is taken to mean a *socially embodied* narrative. This is story in the sense of a first-order activity or practice, the way of life

² These three ideas are not an exhaustive list of community building methods. In the previous chapter I examined another community building idea—the intergenerational meal. The meal was explored as a way of breaking down generational tensions. The three ideas proposed in this chapter are meant to demonstrate that a shift is needed in the church, a transition from purely reason-based congregations to experiential faith communities.

of an actual community or persons oriented toward (and guided by) a common heritage and common goals. On the other hand, however, *story* can refer to a *grounding or legitimating* narrative, to worldview which guides the practice of a given community.³

For the contemporary church, the first definition of story could be seen as their current, unfolding experiences with God, each other and the culture around them; likewise, the second reference to story could be related to the narrative of Scripture and the historical Christian church.

In the previous chapter I argued that the Canadian church must once again find itself and its mission within the story of scripture. I was referring, primarily, to Middleton and Walsh's second definition of *story*. In this section I will expand on what has been written in chapter three to include the church's contemporary narrative as a basis for community building (Middleton and Walsh's first example of *story*). By communicating through stories and narratives, the Canadian church can not only understand, but also embody and experience Truth, as a community.

Before proceeding, it is important to answer this question: what is the contemporary church's story? Simon Chan offers an excellent definition. He writes, "The Christian story is not primarily about how God in Jesus came to rescue sinners from some impending disaster. It is about God's work of initiating us into a fellowship and making us true conversational partners with the Father and the Son through the Spirit and, hence, with each other (1 Jn 1:1-4)."⁴ Being part of a corporate Trinitarian conversation is crucial in creating community. But how can a local church participate in this type of conversation?

³ Middleton and Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be*, 69.

⁴ Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 78.

Preaching and Story

The sermon has been the central place to convey God’s story but it has not, traditionally, been a place of conversation. It has been used to teach without opportunity for interaction. In the postmodern church, preaching is becoming more interactive and experiential. One church that is attempting to use story as an interactive learning tool is Solomon’s Porch Community Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Describing the sermons at his church, Doug Pagitt writes, “we are trying to allow the world we live in and the faith we hold to interact, to dance, to inform each other. We can’t do that if I’m the only one who gets to talk.”⁵ Pagitt uses interactive preaching that incorporates the ideas and stories of those in his congregation. Equal value is placed on everyone’s opinion, even those with whom one might disagree. Pagitt writes:

...there is a larger societal benefit in becoming a people of conversation, in learning to listen to those with whom we disagree. We live in a world that is increasingly separated and fragmented; we are able to live comfortably in circles in which everyone agrees with us. This is comfortable and easy—but it does not make for good Kingdom living. We are all called to learn from and listen to those who would challenge us and not just those who agree with us.⁶

By listening to those with opinions that are different than our own we enter into their story; it validates them and their experience of life. Listening also defuses the speaker’s defense mechanisms, often employed to keep their vulnerable ideas and egos from being trampled on and attacked. In the postmodern church’s story, there are different characters and dramatic plot twists. There are no “good girls” and “bad guys”, only a multitude of people who, together, are looking for Truth. When leaders elicit people’s opinions and treat them as their own, then everyone is welcomed into the church’s story.

⁵ Pagitt, *Reimagining Spiritual Formation*, 94.

⁶ Pagitt, *Reimagining Spiritual Formation*, 91.

It does not mean that all opinions are doctrinally correct; it simply means that all people are on the same level. Spencer Burke believes that pastors must have a “traveler metaphor” if they are to see all people as having something to contribute. He defines a traveler as someone who is “on the way, journeying with others.”⁷ When a leader is willing to journey with others as an equal, not as a tour guide, then God’s community can enjoy a truly shared story.

The leader must not only create opportunities for interaction in sharing God’s story, she must also share her own story publicly. Many church leaders learn how to exegete a biblical text; yet they never learn how to properly exegete themselves. A leader who does not understand himself cannot effectively build a community through story. Many leaders have been taught to craft a written text that will preach well. But preaching should start with a story, rather than a well crafted framework. According to Walter J. Ong, preaching is poetry and it involves the preacher’s life as much as the text being preached: “In memorizing a written text, postponing its recitation generally weakens recall. An oral poet is not working with texts or in a textual framework. He needs time to let the story sink into his own store of themes and formulas, time to ‘get with’ the story.”⁸ Unfortunately, many leaders have neglected to “get with” their own story, let alone the story of their community.

⁷ Burke, *Making Sense of Church*, 37. Burke acknowledges that leaders are often further along the journey than others but they do not have to have all the right answers or know everything about the final destination.

⁸ Walter J. Ong, “Orality and Literacy in Our Times,” *Journal of Communication* 30 (winter 1980): 60. Quoted in Kenton C. Anderson, *Preaching with Conviction: Connecting with Postmodern Listeners* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 114.

Learning and Community

The Western church has emphasized teaching as a discipleship tool for many years. The emergence of the Sunday school movement divided children and adults into age appropriate classrooms to teach and train disciples. But as the culture shifts from modernism to postmodernism, the ways of teaching and learning are rapidly changing. Teaching is no longer the focus. Today, the learner and the experience of learning are at the centre of the discipleship process. Learning, rather than the teaching, has become the most prominent role in community transformation. This shift has two implications for the Canadian church: first, the leader must become primarily a learner and secondarily a teacher; second, the Church must develop learning centered discipleship environments.

Leader as Learner

In a postmodern context, pastors must be at the cutting edge of learning. Gone are the days when Bible College and Seminary training were enough to get by in ministry. These days, leaders who neglect the discipline of learning quickly become irrelevant and superficial teachers. Irrelevance and superficiality stand in the way of personal and corporate transformation. According to Anita Farber-Robertson, “authentic learning changes the learner.”⁹ The postmodern leader must focus on authentic learning in order to see community transformation.

Leaders cannot expect to be able to hide behind their titles, degrees or positions. Postmoderns are not interested in following leaders whose ministries are based on their personal accomplishments and awards. Postmoderns are interested in pastors and leaders who are willing to listen and willing to change. Change is a byproduct of authentic

⁹ Anita Farber-Robertson, *Learning While Leading: Increasing Your Effectiveness in Ministry* (London: Alban Institute, 2000), 62.

learning. Farber-Robertson writes, “The learner’s world expands, discernment is sharpened, some ideas are given up, and others are taken in.”¹⁰ Being open to the advice and scrutiny of another without becoming defensive is a sign of being a learner. To live in an “expanding world”, where change becomes a natural part of leadership, is something that cannot be taught, it can only be learned.

Leaders must be open to learning not only from people who are like them but also from those who are radically different as well. Farber-Robertson calls pastors to discover God in those who are distinctly different. She writes:

We are not invited to find God in the presence of those whose thoughts we already know, whose worldviews we understand, whose experiences confirm our own. We are invited instead to find God in the encounter with those who are distinctly different from us.¹¹

The modernist Western church struggles with the idea that God can be found in those who are different. But postmoderns understand that God is much larger than what is presented in the organized church. Learning from those with different worldviews, those who have different experiences with God, presents the leader with a fresh realization: they are not, in the words of Lesslie Newbigin, “the possessor of all truth”:

It is essential to the integrity of our witness to this new reality that we recognize that to be its witnesses does not mean to be the possessors of all truth. It means to be placed on the path by following which we are led toward the truth.¹²

Many leaders assume that they must have all the answers and function as the gate keepers of spiritual truth for their congregation. That idea is detrimental in a postmodern context, where individuals in the congregation and those in the broader community have access to

¹⁰ Farber-Robertson, *Learning While Leading*, 62.

¹¹ Farber-Robertson, *Learning While Leading*, 119.

¹² Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 12.

greater information and resources than ever before.¹³ A leader whose ministry begins by asking what she can learn from the people around her has the potential to become a leader who will transform, and be transformed by, her community.

Implications for Discipleship in Learning Communities

When a leader makes learning a priority, their church will become a learning community. Learning communities are appealing and contagious. I believe one of the reasons the Canadian church is viewed skeptically by outsiders is because it prides itself on possessing all of life's answers; even more, it has assumed that Canadians are asking questions that demand the church's answers. In so doing, the church has forgotten to observe and learn from broader culture. While learning the priorities of society and culture would be dangerous for the church, learning the evolving communication methods of postmoderns could be beneficial. Learning new ways of communicating with postmoderns would require that the Canadian church spend time listening. Robert Nash writes, "[The church] must learn to watch instead of be watched. It must engage in dialogue instead of evangelistic manipulation. And it must learn to ask questions instead of constantly spouting off answers."¹⁴

1 Cor. 2:16 says, "But we have the mind of Christ." The Apostle Paul was communicating that the greatest potential for discerning and understanding the heart of God is by turning to the community of God. Unfortunately, rather than creating communal learning opportunities, the modernist church has tended to rely on the

¹³ This is an interesting trend that must be noted. At one time, the clergy were the exclusive "possessors of all truth" for their congregations and parishes. This would have been the case when rates of illiteracy were high and the printing press had yet to be invented. Today, the laity and even those who are unchurched can access the internet, books, and hundreds of television channels to surf for information. Today, the pastor may not even be the most biblically literate person in the congregation.

¹⁴ Nash, *An 8-Track Church in a CD World*, 38.

classroom as its primary discipleship tool. Reggie McNeal acknowledges, “Many congregations and their leaders continue to misassume that traditional educational and classroom models are adequate for the pursuit of spiritual formation.”¹⁵ Learning is an important component of spiritual formation; but as McNeal suggests, the classroom is not the best place for holistic learning. The classroom is set up for intellectual change alone. It facilitates the passing of intellectual knowledge from teacher to student: unfortunately, knowledge passing generally stops there.¹⁶ Another imbalance in the Western church’s educational model is articulated by Robert Webber. He believes that education, in the local church, is lacking an incarnational reality:

In our schools and churches we have become ideological competitors who have bought into the ‘worldview’ method of education to counter secularism and support the Christian worldview. But in doing so, says the younger evangelical, the side of education that has been neglected is embodied truth, the truth that lives in *me* and in *you*, the truth that we are called to live out, to be.¹⁷

Embodied truth is the experiential aspect of learning. For the Canadian church to be effective in disciple making, it must focus on the experience of learning that moves beyond the classroom. Effective congregations, as Reggie McNeal states, “are busy creating learning venues for people, not teaching venues.”¹⁸ These venues could take many shapes and sizes. For example, in learning about solitude and prayer a group could participate in a weekend retreat where learners could anticipate hearing firsthand from God. In learning about the church’s proper response to poverty, a group could make

¹⁵ McNeal, *A Work of Heart*, 84.

¹⁶ I have been in the classroom where teachers have been open to learning from students but those are isolated experiences. It was also not the original design or intent of the classroom. There is a power differential between teacher and student, embedded in the education system, which has been crucial to its success.

¹⁷ Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals*, 165.

¹⁸ McNeal, *A Work of Heart*, 84.

regular trips to serve in places where poverty is a reality—whether it be in their city’s downtown or in another country.

In the postmodern context, the teacher must become a facilitator. Spencer Burke believes that people are to imitate the greatest leader of all—Jesus Christ:

We often say that Jesus is the greatest teacher of all, but in actual fact, the Scriptures show Jesus formally teaching only a few times. The rest of the accounts describe him helping people learn in the context of their real lives—coming alongside them, asking thought-provoking questions, and giving them an opportunity to fit the pieces together on their own.¹⁹

I believe Jesus provides a perfect example of the necessary balance between teacher and facilitator in a postmodern context. While Jesus did facilitate learning, He also taught. Teaching is an essential component to discipleship; but it is not the only one.

Learning in community also involves self-discovery. Community creates opportunity to hear the words we do not want to hear. Anita Farber-Robertson writes,

To the extent that you can be part of an authentic and open community of inquiry, you will be more likely to discover what you need to know. To the extent that members of your community are committed to your learning and theirs, they are more likely to raise difficult questions and observations publicly.²⁰

Farber-Robertson is advocating a different approach to learning. Her approach encourages people to move from Model I to Model II social virtues.²¹ Model I virtues encompass behaviour such as: offering approval and praise; telling people what they want to hear; minimizing disapproval and blame, not challenging other people’s reasoning processes, showing capacity to hold your position in the face of another’s advocacy, and

¹⁹ Burke, *Making Sense of Church*, 54.

²⁰ Farber-Robertson, *Learning While Leading*, 107.

²¹ For an excellent summary of the social virtues, including a helpful chart that outlines the differences between Model I and II, see the chapter entitled “Trapped by Virtue” in Farber-Robertson, *Learning While Leading*, 17-36.

sticking to your values and principles; not caving in.²² This is a list of behaviours that someone who is not open to personal transformation might manifest. She argues that we are raised to embrace Model I social virtues, but those virtues only set us up for failure.

By contrast, embracing Model II social virtues opens us and those around us to change. Model II social virtues are embodied by these characteristics: helping individuals to become aware of the reasoning processes; helping them become aware of gaps and inconsistencies, seeing human beings as capable of and interested in learning, behaving in a way that demonstrates a high capacity for advocacy coupled with a high capacity for inquiry and vulnerability without feeling threatened, and advocating and acting on one's point of view in such a way as to encourage confrontation and inquiry into it.²³ Farber-Robertson writes, "If we believe that it is useful to inquire of and confront others about their position and reasoning processes, then we must encourage others to behave the same way toward us."²⁴ Farber-Robertson's model calls for personal and community learning accountability. For the leader who is serious about self-learning, embracing Model II social virtues is a good pathway to transformation. It is not a quick fix but provides an excellent and innovative framework for personal change, which is itself a leadership essential.

Technology, New Forms of Communication and Community

The technological advancements of the last fifty years have brought sweeping change to Canadian society. To effectively minister in this society, the postmodern leader must understand and embrace technology as a means of communicating with their

²² Farber-Robertson, *Learning While Leading*, 19.

²³ Farber-Robertson, *Learning While Leading*, 27.

²⁴ Farber-Robertson, *Learning While Leading*, 29.

congregations and the broader community. David Lyon writes, “The groups that will find a voice will be those that are able to encode their messages, their symbols, in ways that adapt them for the new media.”²⁵ Media is constantly changing and evolving, yet the church is often out of touch with and unwilling to integrate new media into their communities. As a result, the Western church’s communicative strategies are largely dated: they are stuck in a previous era. An example of this is the style of music that many churches use in their weekend services. Many Canadian churches are still using the same musical style that they were using in the mid-twentieth century. This reveals a failure to adopt new media in those churches. To allow this trend to continue is a serious mistake for church leaders. It is only a matter of time before the current, institutional church’s way of communicating will be totally irrelevant to Canadian culture. Reggie McNeal points back hundreds of years as a way of paralleling the current dilemma:

The last information revolution, triggered by the invention of the printing press and moveable type, took only fifty years to put the monks out of their centuries-long monopoly in the information industry. The latest information revolution carries implications just as far reaching for the church today.²⁶

If the information revolution currently underway will change how people communicate, how should leaders in the postmodern church proceed? It is important to note that while effective communication in the postmodern context requires the use of new media, it goes beyond the tools. I believe the postmodern leader’s effectiveness rests on the extent to which they engage in two things: participatory and sensory communication.

Participatory Communication

Experiential leaders participate in every facet of community life. The

²⁵ Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland*, 144.

²⁶ McNeal, *A Work of Heart*, 87.

communication goal of the postmodern leader is not accomplished by being tucked away in an office, crafting sermons and counseling parishioners; the communication goal is best accomplished by living life in the community. Many pastors are trained to focus their time and energy on the weekend service, spending the bulk of their time on sermon preparation. This idea is exemplified, for example in Robert Anderson's book, *The Effective Pastor*, when he states,

Since the Sunday morning service almost always attracts the largest audience of any church event, it is our greatest opportunity to exercise the preaching-teaching ministry. As a result, we should spend much time and effort in careful preparation for the service so that the sermon we give is the best we are capable of presenting.²⁷

Since when has the church become interested in attracting crowds? What makes a church leader believe their time spent preparing to speak to a crowd is the best use of their communicative time? Would not a leader's integration into the community to communicate through actions be a better investment of their time? Is that not a better idea than preparing in isolation for a half-an-hour speech to a crowd?

The early Christian community practised participatory communication when leaders passed on their life skills by calling people to follow their ways, not just their teachings. Robert Webber summarizes that practise when he writes:

Communication occurred through immersion in the stories and shared wisdom of the community, which conveyed the Christian vision of reality. Communication did not occur by some formal method of education but simply through lived experience, involvement and participation in the ongoing life of the community.²⁸

The idea of immersion into a community is foreign to most Westerners. We are

²⁷ Robert C. Anderson, *The Effective Pastor: A Practical Guide to the Ministry* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 160.

²⁸ Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals*, 62.

accustomed to independence, autonomy and control. To be immersed, however, is to be dropped into an environment where independence, autonomy and control are lost; individualism must give way to community and self-interests must be submitted to the interests of the community. It is in that environment that a leader can learn the language of the community. Thus, when the leader learns the community's language, participatory communication becomes transformational. Learning the community's language takes time and a willingness to be immersed. Many leaders preach, assuming they already know the language of their community. But have they taken the time to be immersed before addressing their community? If not, they will have to deal with a language barrier. Before effective preaching can happen, the leader must be immersed in that community. Doug Pagitt refers to language learning in spiritual formation when he writes, "In educational settings, the theory of language acquisition through immersion is by far the most successful means of learning. So it is with Christian faith."²⁹ Transformation is not primarily classroom-based. It is not primarily pulpit-based. It is based primarily in participation. Transformation requires immersion into a community.

In the modernist church, intellectual understanding and comprehension were priorities; in the postmodern church, change in personal and community praxis becomes the goal. By participating in community life, the leader communicates by modeling an example for the community. In this way, even the leader's faults and mistakes become opportunities to communicate repentance, reconciliation and forgiveness.³⁰

²⁹ Pagitt, *Reimagining Spiritual Formation*, 27.

³⁰ These themes will be more fully explored in chapter eight.

Sensory Communication

Echoing a sentiment held by many younger Canadian churchgoers, Doug Pagitt testifies, “I wanted to be led to places where thinking was not the sum of spiritual life, where thinking could be joined with experience, emotion, and imagination. I hoped that artists could show me the secret places of faith in which to find God.”³¹ Pagitt’s honest examination reveals the lack of sensory communication that exists in many Western evangelical churches. To be effective, postmodern leaders must wrestle with communicating to more than the intellect alone.

One way of moving beyond appealing to the intellect is by employing the imagination. Using one’s imagination is viewed skeptically by many modernist churchgoers.³² They fear that imagination might be used to divert the mind away from the rational truth of Christianity. Even the subject of vision, a hot topic in the mega church movement, is often guarded by a rational framework. David Taylor believes many modernists are afraid of the imagination and its use of less conventional forms of communication. Quoting Taylor, Robert Webber writes:

The fear of the imagination comes from the reality that art is ‘less controllable than the rational-factual.’ The imagination draws on forms of communication that are considerably less controlled—in fact, the imagination celebrates ‘ambiguity, paradox, mystery, and irony’—all of which is deeply mistrusted by the modern evangelical mindset, which is shaped by science and reason.³³

Postmodern leaders are comfortable with sensory communication that sometimes does not resolve into a neat package. As Taylor explained, communicating using the non-

³¹ Pagitt, *Reimagining Spiritual Formation*, 129.

³² By way of personal example: one family in my small group refused to participate in a guided meditation that was based on imagining Jesus conversing with us. They were not prepared to move beyond the rational into the experience of visualization for fear that it might become satanic.

³³ David Taylor, response to questionnaire, summer 2000. Quoted in Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals*, 206-207.

rational imagination means being comfortable with the ambiguous, paradoxical, mysterious and ironic.

Turning to another facet of sensory communication, one of the most insightful ideas I have read on the subject of communication is from David Lyon. In writing about the impact of the internet on society and religion he states, “In cyberspace, it seems, flesh becomes word, which lives among us, malleable and pointing only to itself. Is this deincarnation?”³⁴ Lyon highlights a change in our culture, one that has the potential of steering the postmodern church into doctrinal instability. Whereas the modernist church’s rational approach to the Scriptures nurtured people who knew, for the most part, what they should and should not become, the internet allows and even enables people to become anyone they want. In a culture where personal experiences do not have to fit within a rational framework, a middle aged man can become a teenage girl in an internet community and no one would know the difference. All of these contemporary experiences are created using words in cyberspace. Never before have words been able to create an interactive virtual-life or virtual-lives that are wholly different from reality.

In a cyberworld where words are used to create a false identity, people are left without a genuine, flesh-to-flesh encounter with another human being. This is the deincarnation referred to by David Lyon. Because many postmoderns spend vast amounts of time in cyberspace they are left hungering for an authentic encounter with the real and the tangible. This creates an advantage for the sensory communicator. It causes people to hunger for an encounter where they can see, hear, touch, taste and feel that

³⁴ Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland*, 68.

which is real. This happens during worship³⁵ but also in the face to face interactions created by faith communities.

Summary

Whereas pastors in a modernist church context relied heavily on rationalism, postmodern pastors and church leaders must be experiential in their leadership styles. In this chapter I have argued that leadership in a postmodern church will demand the leader's active participation in community life, rather than her involvement as an expert who remains isolated and distant from those she serves. As stated earlier, a better approach is to view experiential leadership as a dance: it is fluid, it demands more than one person, and it is highly participatory. In this chapter I have examined experiential leadership as a means of developing community in the postmodern church. Three facets of experiential leadership were explored: story and community, learning and community, and communication/technology in community.

One of the most powerful tools that a leader can have is the ability to tell stories, stories of God's unfolding plan and stories of their community's journey with God. Story is, after all, God's way of revealing Himself and His purposes to His people. Story can be used in preaching as a way to draw people into an experience with the text and the author of the text. Story can also be used in an interactive environment where people are free to share their own stories as a way of participating in the community. Effective leaders listen to other people's stories, regardless of whether or not they are doctrinally sound, and validate them in the process. Along with hearing and validating the

³⁵ The following chapter will explore some of the ways the postmodern leader and their community can engage the senses of the participants in their communication with God. In this chapter however, I am only able to explore how leaders can employ the senses in their communication with other people.

experiences and stories of others comes the requirement that the leader share their own story with the community. The leader's story cannot be "candy-coated" or falsely sanctified but must be genuine and authentic. Only when the leader can integrate their story into their congregation's story will they see authentic transformation in that community.

Postmodern leaders must be learners. Learning to a leader is like water to the human body: it is essential. Postmoderns are interested in whether a person is open to advice and willing to change. A learner is one who is constantly open to God as well as the suggestions and ideas of others. Being open to those who hold similar values and ideals is only part of the leader's calling; the other part is a willingness to be challenged by those who are fundamentally different. Learning leaders cultivate learning communities: communities where people learn from their broader society. They are not afraid of extending their learning horizons beyond the walls of the Christian community since they recognize that Christianity, although it is the foundation and framework around which Truth is discerned, does not possess all of the world's truth. Leaders and communities where learning is a priority are not bound to the classroom to discover truth. They seek to embody truth rather than intellectualize it. They are on a continual journey of self-discovery, knowing that true learning makes inner transformation an external reality.

Finally, postmodern leaders must be comfortable with using technology and new forms of communication as a means of promoting community. Canadian society has gone through dramatic technological changes in the last fifty years. Those changes have made communication more important than ever before. Yet those changes have also

created challenges for those interested in genuine, face to face communication. In this chapter I explored two types of communication: participatory and sensory. Both are important in building community in the postmodern church.

Participatory communication is experiential and communal. Leaders who engage in participatory communication spend time immersed in their community. They embody what they believe and what they want to communicate. In participating in community, postmodern leaders communicate with those around them without having to rely primarily on what they say at a weekend service. Postmodern leaders must also rely on sensory communication. Sensory communication moves beyond the intellect to employ other facets of human life, like the imagination. By using the imagination, communication becomes less about logic and reason and more about mystery and paradox. It is viewed skeptically by modernists since it does not resolve into something that can be intellectually packaged; the postmodern, however, embraces the imagination as a means of communicating things like stories and theological truth. Sensory communication is also critical in this age of technological advancement. While being reliant on the internet and e-mail, people are hungering for authentic connections with flesh and blood. These connections can be found in the church. Postmodern leaders must learn to balance their cyberspace connections with real life contact in order to take full advantage of sensory communication.

Experience is a leadership essential. It brings balance to modernism's rationalistic approach. It enables leaders to connect with their community beyond reason and the intellect. But experience is only one characteristic on which a postmodern leader's effectiveness hinges. There are others that must be employed alongside

experience. One of the most important characteristics to a church leader is an authentic spirituality. Describing and developing the postmodern church leader's spirituality will be the focus of the next chapter.

FIVE

THE SPIRITUAL LEADER: ABANDONING DICHOTOMIES THROUGH CONVERSATION, RITUAL AND ECOLOGICAL CONCERN

Postmoderns are openly spiritual. As a byproduct of their emphasis on experience, they crave a connection with the supernatural. Heightened spirituality has become an unexpected and unpredicted transition in Canadian culture. But not everyone has recognized this shift. Pollster Michael Adams wrote in 1997: “Canadians are increasingly focused on immediate gratification, and have pretty much given up on the promises—and **threats**—of an afterlife.”¹ Adams missed the emerging postmodern reality by believing that Canadians’ lack of interest in organized religion signaled a lack of belief in spiritual things. Reginald Bibby, on the other hand, offers a different perspective:

Our Project Canada surveys have found that, since 1975, the proportion of those offering a clear-cut ‘no’ [to the question, ‘do you believe in life after death] has actually decreased from 17% in the mid-70s to 10% as of 2000. Since 1975, a consistent majority of about 65% has asserted positive belief.²

While Canadians’ belief in an afterlife has remained relatively consistent over the years, spirituality has become more prevalent and accepted in mainstream society. Bibby suggests that God may be employing a different strategy these days. He suggests:

The prevalence of belief, experience, prayer, and spiritual quest in the lives of so many Canadians of all ages may mean that God has been stirring in the

¹ Michael Adams, *Sex in the Snow: Canadian Social Values at the End of the Millennium* (Toronto: Penguin, 1997; Penguin, 1998), 31.

² Bibby, *Restless Gods*, 118.

lives of people across the country. Perhaps God has grown impatient with the churches, and has chosen to accelerate a supplementary but more effective strategy: relating to people directly.³

While Bibby's explanation for Canadians' heightened spirituality is interesting, it is not of particular importance to this thesis. The surge in postmodern spirituality and the essential nature of spirituality in community transformation is, however, of importance, particularly as it relates to church leadership.

In the preceding chapter, I argued that a leader's emphasis on experience rather than rationalism is an important community building asset in the postmodern church. Likewise, a leader's dependence on God has greater significance than an ability to offer their congregation empty rituals and simplistic answers to life's challenging questions.⁴ Many modernist leaders have been trained for church ministry by learning how to be morally good and learning how to keep congregations doctrinally pure. Many modernist churches have equated moral purity and sound rational belief with righteous spirituality, but is that an accurate depiction of spirituality? In the book, *A New Kind of Christian*, Brian McLaren uses the character Neo to communicate the danger of equating righteousness with moralism:

“Modern Christianity has too often acted as if the only kind of righteousness that mattered was the kind of righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees—the righteousness of nice, clean, legalistic monads who managed to stay disconnected and disinfected on the other side of the street.”⁵

The postmodern church has a difficult task. While moral righteousness is important, the

³ Reginald W. Bibby, *Restless Churches: How Canada's Churches Can Contribute to the Emerging Religious Renaissance* (Toronto: Novalis, 2004), 54.

⁴ It is not my intention to downplay the significance of rituals and meaningful answers to the questions of life. My focus is on the subtle tendency of leaders to rely on the reason-based, scientific approach in everything from interpreting Scripture to offering advice to a struggling congregant.

⁵ McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian*, 101.

church must allow moral transformation to proceed from a priority of connecting with God rather than starting with heightened morality as a vehicle of spiritual transformation. By way of example, one of the Elders' concerns at First Modernist Church was that the auction had compromised the moral integrity of their church. They believed God was displeased by the event and they needed to make amends. The postmodern small group, however, saw the auction itself as inherently spiritual; they believed the auction was a taste of God's kingdom in their midst. While the modernist Canadian church has tended to call people to moral transformation, it has been at the expense of discovering the mystery of God and the Christian faith. That spiritual hunger for mystery is quickly becoming a central part of postmodern Canada. Reginald Bibby summarizes his findings in the conclusion of *Restless Gods*:

There is a stirring among large numbers of people outside the churches, who are pursuing answers about life and death and spiritual needs with more openness than at perhaps any time in our nation's history. Much more private and much less publicized is the fact that three in four people are talking to God at least occasionally.⁶

How should the spiritual leader respond to the heightened spirituality in Canadian culture?

The focus of this chapter will be responding to that question. I will explore a variety of ways in which postmodern spirituality is distinct from modernist spirituality. I will also suggest ideas for engaging postmodern spirituality, beginning with the discipline of theological reflection. I will examine the place of meaningful conversation as a means to breaking down the traditional dichotomy between the secular and sacred. I will also

⁶ Bibby, *Restless Gods*, 227.

explore the longing for God's transcendence and the demand for ecological preservation as ways that postmoderns are looking for God beyond the walls of institutional churches.

What is Theological Reflection?

I believe the spiritual leader can call their communities to spiritual transformation through the discipline of theological reflection. Theological reflection begins in relationship with God and His people. It is not a "how-to" quick fix but a discipline that calls God's people to change through listening. According to Henri Nouwen, theological reflection is "reflecting on the painful and joyful realities of every day with the mind of Jesus and thereby raising human consciousness to the knowledge of God's gentle guidance."⁷ It is a way of aligning the human mind with the thoughts and desires of God. It moves beyond reading the Bible and praying for a list of needs, to a place where actions and events are discerned in light of God's unfolding story. It is beginning to think and act with the mind and mission of Christ. This is different than learning how to counsel and offer therapy to people who need help. Henri Nouwen offers this insight on pastoral leadership void of theological reflection:

Without solid theological reflection, future leaders will be little more than pseudo-psychologists, pseudo-sociologists, pseudo-social workers. They will think of themselves as enablers, facilitators, role models, father or mother figures, big brothers or big sisters, and so on, and thus join the countless men and women who make a living by trying to help their fellow human beings to cope with the stresses and strains of everyday living.⁸

By contrast, there is a need for postmodern leaders to practise theological reflection as a means of offering the mind of Christ rather than offering self-help techniques to their communities. The convenience of self-help techniques makes them an easy choice for

⁷ Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 68.

⁸ Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 66.

the busy postmodern leader, but reflection must precede action. Reflection must also be theological, rather than practical. Many pastors take time to reflect but it is largely from, what Alan Roxburgh calls “a worldview of technical rationality”:

Pastors reflect upon their settings from primarily a *practical* perspective. This is not simply because they must function with the daily exigencies of pastoral ministry in a mundane world, but because they are part of the worldview of technical rationality. The emphasis and popularity of the practical comes at the expense of *theological* reflection.⁹

Thinking theologically is often assumed to be a technical and rational process. Modernist spiritual leadership has tended to appropriate and “sanctify” business models and tools. But theological reflection is fluid, not systematic. Theological reflection casts aside the paradigms of effective management in the church; it creates space for listening and awareness, and it calls for personal and corporate transformation.

Spiritual Leaders have Spiritual Conversations

Theological reflection is essentially a spiritual conversation. “It is a conversation we might have internally, with our selves, as well as a conversation we might have with other people,” write Joyce Bellous and Dan Sheffield, “the conversation is a dialogue not a monologue.”¹⁰ Conversation is not usually understood to be spiritually transformative but I believe it can be. Many Western churches operate on the assumption that practising corporate spirituality means doing something to connect with someone who is outside the community and people’s daily life routine. As an example, I was talking with a friend recently who leads a small group in a local church. He mentioned that he would like to have an occasional social event with his small group but was afraid that the “spiritual”

⁹ Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership, and Liminality*, 20-21.

¹⁰ Joyce E. Bellous and Dan Sheffield, *Learning the Art of Theological Reflection* (Hamilton: McMaster Divinity College, 2004), 2.

side of small group would be neglected. If his small group met socially, he wanted to make sure there was a spiritual component to it. When I asked what that looked like, he responded that it meant singing some choruses or spending time praying. While these ideas about spirituality are not bad, they create an unnecessary dichotomy: they equate the praxis of spirituality with that which is in addition to everyday life practices. Further, if God is approached best by corporate singing and praying then it means that God dwells outside the human community: God is seen as removed from the everyday decisions and actions of His community, the Church.

Breaking down the Dichotomy

Whether articulated or not, the Western church lives in a constant dichotomy between the sacred and secular. Actions, institutions and occupations are largely understood in dualistic terms. Walsh and Middleton examine how the sacred and secular interact in their book, *The Transforming Vision*:

The kingdom of God (or the sacred) comes to be identified primarily with the church, while the rest of life is seen as secular. When people begin to feel the limitations of such a sacred/secular dualism, they say that the gospel must be ‘made relevant’ to the rest of society. But what they often mean is that one institution, the church, must be made relevant to the other cultural institutions (the family, school, state and so on).¹¹

This explains why my friend felt the need to integrate the “spiritual” (sacred) into the “social” (secular). Even though it often feels contrived and awkward to insert elements that we perceive as “spiritual” into otherwise “non-spiritual” events, we still feel the need to do it. Will that trend continue as society moves deeper into postmodernism?

According to Dave Tomilson, the postmodern stresses the spiritual dimension of

¹¹ Walsh and Middleton, *The Transforming Vision*, 96.

everyday life.¹² Because postmoderns see spirituality as encompassing life holistically, every action, thought, and conversation becomes spiritual. That is the basic premise of *The Practice of the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence. Lawrence's goal is to make every aspect of his life worship to God, including the most mundane task of washing dishes. Therefore, holistic spirituality is not a new concept, but a return to a more ancient understanding of spirituality.

It is in this new/ancient concept of holistic spirituality that theological reflection can be used as a way of engaging both Christians and non-Christians in the story of God. Conversations become moments of theological reflection that can be nurtured anywhere; they are not limited to the church building. This is good news since, as discovered by Reginald Bibby,

There's little doubt about it. Canadians not only have an interest in spirituality, but a solid majority also say they have spiritual needs, and more than half see themselves as spiritual. Yet when it comes right down to sharing their sense of spirituality, a remarkably small number are relating what they understand and feel to others in religious settings.¹³

If Canadians are uncomfortable talking about 'their sense of spirituality' within a religious setting, other conversational venues must be sought. My suggestion, one that brings together Canadian identity, conversation and coffee, is an intergenerational hotspot of spirituality—Tim Hortons!

When conversation itself is embraced as spiritual and as an opportunity to connect with people and God at the same time, the secular/sacred dichotomy will begin to crumble. When conversations can be used as a vehicle for theological reflection then

¹² Dave Tomlinson, *The Post Evangelical* (London: SPCK Triangle, 1995). Quoted in Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland*, 49.

¹³ Bibby, *Restless Gods*, 200.

talks with friends become opportunities to allow Christ to do His transformative work. Of course this means moving beyond superficial conversations about the weather and the rising prices at the gas pumps into conversations about more important subjects such as, what it means to love God and love people (Luke 10:27).

But conversation is only one part of a needed shift in how the church fosters Christian spirituality. While God is beyond all that he created, including the human community, He is not separate and detached from those who are looking for Him; rather, He is present in the mysterious and transformative person of Jesus Christ. This is “good news” to postmoderns who want to experience God’s immanent presence.

Transcendence and Spirituality

The longing for transcendence, according to Alan Roxburgh, is connected—at least in popular imagination—to the spirituality of Eastern mysticism:

People are attracted to Eastern mysticism principally because they long to transcend the separateness believed to be rooted in our thought-forms and practiced in our traditional spiritualities. They are grafting into their belief systems spiritualities that seem to connect them with the cosmic whole. This is what we mean by the search for transcendence.¹⁴

Many people, particularly postmoderns, are becoming unsettled with the traditional dichotomy between the sacred and secular and are looking for experiences that allow God to act in their lives. Most of these experiences are broadly spiritual.¹⁵ The role of the postmodern Christian leader is to lead their people into an experience with the person of Jesus Christ in particular. This is not an easy task. Henri Nouwen explains, “This is a

¹⁴ Roxburgh, *Reaching a New Generation*, 114.

¹⁵ Roxburgh quotes a section of C.S. Lewis’s book, *The Pilgrim’s Regress* to describe those whose experiential spirituality is devoid of rational boundaries, “[They] are by their very nature less definable; boneless souls whose doors stand open day and night to almost every visitant, . . . the smudging of all frontiers, the relaxation of resistances, dreams, opium, darkness, death, and the return to the womb. Every

hard discipline, since God's presence is often a hidden presence, a presence that needs to be discovered. The loud, boisterous noises of the world make us deaf to the soft, gentle, and loving voice of God."¹⁶ Creating opportunities for people to experience God will demand more than modernist, rationalistic tools. Unfortunately, the Western church has become dependent on those modernist tools. Reggie McNeal describes the change needed in churches in these words:

It would be a huge mistake on the church's part to continue its pursuit of programs and methodological prowess (what 'works') when the world desperately seeks for God. Only when something goes on in church that can be explained as a God-thing will a spiritually fascinated culture pause to take notice.¹⁷

If programs and methodologies founded on rationalism will not work, how can the postmodern church foster Christian spirituality? I believe it begins with understanding and integrating ancient, experiential, Christian rituals into worship. Robert Webber lists the recovery of the church calendar, the daily office's call to prayer, the spiritual pilgrimage, the prayer labyrinth, Lectio Divina, spiritual direction, and the use of icons in worship as ancient Christian rituals that are now being practised by postmoderns.¹⁸ These practices are rooted in the heritage and tradition of the Christian church. They call people into a spiritual experience with God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit by relying on participation rather than rationalism. But the ancient is not the only way the church can foster Christian spirituality; the postmodern church would benefit from creating new rituals as well. One church that is using creativity to establish new rituals is

feeling is justified by the mere fact that it is felt." C. S. Lewis, *The Pilgrim's Regress* (Glasgow, U.K.: Collins/Fount, 1990), 18-19. Quoted in Roxburgh, *Reaching a New Generation*, 112.

¹⁶ Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 68-69.

¹⁷ McNeal, *A Work of Heart*, 81.

¹⁸ Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals*, 182-85. These rituals have been neglected, in particular, by evangelical churches that have chosen to focus on internal practices rather than outward rituals.

Solomon's Porch Community Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. There they offer a gallery of art as a way of facilitating community transformation. In the words of a churchgoer named Javier Sampedro, "[A good work of art] invites you to look inside of it, to explore it, to play inside it, and while you are there, it is quietly and skillfully asking us to go back into the world changed. I don't think we can ever remain the same after experiencing good art."¹⁹ At Solomon's Porch, creative expressions such as the art gallery are woven into the fabric of their church as a way of proclaiming the creativity of God. This is only one example of a church that is creating a ritual that fosters Christian spirituality. It is a creative way to connect with a creative God.

Ecology and Spirituality

The modernist, Western church has, for the most part, divorced itself from the spirituality of creation. The reason is largely eschatological in nature: modernists have apparently clung to a theology of the second coming of Christ that sees the created world being rejected while people's souls are extracted from their bodies.²⁰ Brian McLaren colourfully illustrates the hope of many modernist Christians as being,

A skyhook Second Coming, wrapping up the whole of creation like an empty candy wrapper and throwing it in the cosmic dumpster so God can finally bring our souls to heaven, beyond time, beyond messy matter, beyond this creation entirely. There is virtually no continuity between this creation and the new heavenly creation in this model; this creation is erased like a mistake, discarded like a non-recyclable milk carton.²¹

This eschatological paradigm has created a dichotomy between creation (physical) and

¹⁹ Pagitt, *Reimagining Spiritual Formation*, 138.

²⁰ Roxburgh believes there are numerous factors that have contributed to the modernist church's disregard for creation. He includes: the theme of dominion in Genesis 1, nonhuman creation as unimportant to God, spirituality as world-denying, salvation limited to the soul, and the supremacy of the individual. Roxburgh, *Reaching a New Generation*, 80-81.

²¹ Brian D. McLaren, *a Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 237.

the coming kingdom of God (spiritual). But, is the kingdom of God really something that is removed from creation? Is the hope of Christ's return only about "spiritual" redemption? Tom Sine answers that "in Hebrew literature the image of God's future always includes the creation and is never divorced from it."²² Spiritual redemption is not only an internal, personal reality: creation too, will be redeemed. Middleton and Walsh offer biblical references that speak of creation's redemptive hope:

Biblical hope is hope that creational mourning will be turned to joy, groaning will give way to songs of praise. This is why Ezekiel offers a 'covenant of peace' that is a vision of creational harmony (34:25-30), Hosea promises a covenant with the animals and birds in which creation will engage in a mutual and fruitful responsiveness (2:14-23), and Isaiah proclaims that the wilderness will bloom, the mountains and the hills will burst into song and the trees of will clap their hands (55:12-13).²³

Postmoderns believe that spirituality cannot be divorced from the physical dimension. The tendency to divide the physical creation from the spiritual realm is a modernist construct that is fading. According to Alan Roxburgh, postmoderns believe "that our minds and nature form a single unity, in which there is no mind separate from body and no god separate from creation." Roxburgh sees this transition as, "a renewed sensuous relationship with nature."²⁴ While many postmoderns may view God as part of creation, for Christian postmoderns the emphasis is on caring for creation as a valuable part of living in His kingdom. Caring for creation is one way of seeing God's kingdom come and His will done, "on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10).

The postmodern leader must understand and embrace a spirituality that is not divorced from creation. Creation then, is acknowledged and respected as a living part of

²² Sine, *Mustard Seed vs. McWorld*, 158.

²³ Middleton and Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be*, 154.

²⁴ Roxburgh, *Reaching a New Generation*, 114.

God's kingdom. Brian McLaren envisions a kingdom where everything God has created matters:

In this kingdom, Jesus said, sparrows matter. Lilies of the field matter. Yes, people matter even more, but it's not a matter of either/or; it's a matter of degree in a realm where everything that is good matters—where everything God made matters.²⁵

If it matters to God then it should matter to His people. The call of the postmodern spiritual leader is to enjoy, respect and care for creation; embracing it as a vehicle to know and worship the Creator. This is clearly stated by the Apostle Paul in Romans 1:20, “For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.” By embracing creation in order to know God, the leader's example will naturally proclaim what Lesslie Newbigin adamantly stated in his book, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, “that there is no separation of the inward and spiritual from the outward, visible, and social.”²⁶ For postmodern church leaders this means that spirituality is more than a collection of moments that can be noted on a daily calendar. Each moment, action and conversation become an exercise in spirituality.²⁷

A Final Note about Spirituality

I want to be clear about one potential danger of stressing the experiential side of spirituality. I do not believe in proclaiming the supremacy of either experience or reason when it comes to spirituality. I believe that both must be held in a delicate balance. This

²⁵ McLaren, *a Generous Orthodoxy*, 238.

²⁶ Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986; reprint, 2001), 97 (page citations are to the reprint edition). While Newbigin does not refer to nature and creation in his book, his reference to the false dichotomy between internal spirituality and external actions in society can include ecological concern.

²⁷ Nash, *An 8-Track Church in a CD World*, 78.

chapter has focused on the experiential character of spirituality. The reason for this is simple: experiential spirituality has been undervalued during the period of modernism; it has been held captive to rationalism. Yet to emphasize experiential spirituality is not to go to the other extreme of promoting spirituality without a centre. I like what Alan Nelson writes in his book, *Spirituality and Leadership*:

When spirituality is overly mystical and esoteric, it loses its impact. A faceless, wishy-washy energy field with no absolutes does little to help us focus on what is meaningful. Spirituality without boundaries tends to be diluted and powerless.²⁸

When individual and corporate spirituality are rooted in the person and work of Jesus Christ, rather than being diluted and powerless, it will be potent and dynamic.

Summary

Survey results indicate that Canadians are open to spiritual things. While they may not be interested in the spirituality of the institutional church, they are open to other forms of spiritual expression. Examining those other forms has been the focus of this chapter.

Church leaders in Canada must be prepared to follow Christ in every area of life; they must forsake the dichotomy between sacred and secular. Spiritual leaders will find their way through the maze of postmodern spirituality by engaging in conversational theological reflection. By entering a dialogue with God the leader can find themselves in Christ; by entering a dialogue with others, the leader can participate in individual and community transformation.

²⁸ Alan E. Nelson, *Spirituality and Leadership: Harnessing the Wisdom, Guidance, and Power of the Soul* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2002), 15.

The postmodern church leader will need to cultivate corporate disciplines and practices that focus on the transcendence of God as they foster postmodern spirituality. Ancient Christian rituals as well as new and spontaneous practices will be helpful in nurturing congregational discipleship.

The postmodern church leader will need to address the dichotomy between the spiritual realm and the physical realm of creation, believing that all of creation is innately spiritual and is valued by God. Creation itself is also an important part of knowing God since the physical world is not divorced from the spiritual realm.

The health of the Christian community is essential for the church to effectively serve its community in the twentieth century. While spirituality is one facet of the postmodern leader's character, they will also need to work along with others. Collaboration will be one of the most important aspects of community empowerment in the postmodern context. Collaboration and team ministry will be examined in the following chapter.

SIX

THE COLLABORATIVE LEADER: EMPOWERING A COMMUNITY THROUGH LISTENING AND LEARNING¹

At the heart of the postmodern shift is a longing for community. This is true in society at large but particularly in the church. People are no longer satisfied with autonomous church leaders dictating commands to their congregation. Rather, they long for their voices to be heard. They want to be participants. They want egalitarian communities where leaders and people are on level ground. They want to believe that church leaders and communities can be mutually transformed. But is this happening in Canadian churches? Are churches and their leaders being molded by each other or is one doing more shaping than the other?

Many congregational leaders have embraced the modernist principle of autonomy by incorporating it into their leadership styles. In a time when the general population respected autonomous leaders and empowered them to make decisions and facilitate congregational change, autonomy nurtured functional church leadership. But postmoderns are not comfortable with leadership autonomy. They are interested in a team approach to leadership.

I believe that collaboration is a necessary characteristic of twenty-first century church leaders. In this chapter, I will begin by outlining why collaboration sets postmodern leaders apart from modernist leaders. I will define and develop the traits of

¹ A large portion of this chapter was previously submitted as an assignment for the Church Leadership course at McMaster Divinity College, winter 2005. The title of the paper was *Collaborative Leadership: Empowering a Community through Listening*.

collaborative leaders: the ability to empower, the creation of community and the skill of listening and learning.

Modernist church leadership has largely centered on the role of one autonomous figure, the pastor. And while many modernist churches have been led by humble, servant leaders, others have been hijacked by leaders who have fallen into the trap that autonomy offers, absolute power. Autocratic, dictatorial methods of leadership, nurtured by the position of autonomy, must give way to collaborative, community empowerment. Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus describe the misuse of power by leaders in their book, *Leaders: Strategies for Taking Charge*: “Historically leaders have controlled rather than organized, administered repression rather than expression, and held their followers in arrestment rather than in evolution.”² The greatest damage the church has sustained in recent decades has been done at the hands of leadership—authoritarian leadership.

From Autonomous Leadership to Collaborative Leadership

The business world has crept into the culture of the church. While I was visiting a small, rural Ontario church on Easter Sunday, 2005 Jesus was referred to as my “CEO.” Is this what He had in mind when he said: “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Matt. 20:28)?

Many leaders of the modernist mega church movement made individual authority, in the local church, their business. Robert Webber traces the emergence of this leadership imbalance in his book, *The Younger Evangelicals*:

By the end of the first century, church leadership was situated in bishops, presbyters, and deacons; by the medieval period, there was a pope, cardinals, archbishops, bishops, priests, and deacons; in the

² Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, *Leaders: Strategies for Taking Charge* (New York: HarperBusiness Essentials, 2003), 15.

sixteenth century, the Reformers placed leadership in a council of presbyters; by the seventeenth century, a more democratic form of government, congregationalism, emerged; and by the latter part of the twentieth century, leadership in many evangelical churches was modeled on business and the power of the CEO.³

Many pastors and churches have structured their congregations around the business model. But as I stated earlier, the role of pastor as CEO is neither biblical nor culturally wise. Society is changing: fewer people trust those who wield their positions of power in congregational settings. Whereas modernism emphasized autonomy in leadership, postmoderns are skeptical of anyone who sets themselves apart from their community. The postmodern church leader will be one who abandons the hierarchical model of leadership in favour of community empowerment. This demands participation in the life of the community.⁴ Postmoderns tend to follow individuals who use power creatively—they give it away.

There is a shift currently underway in our culture. One of the issues affected is authority. Reggie McNeal claims authority is viewed differently by Generation Xers' than it is by baby boomers. While he was teaching a class, an argument erupted between some boomers and Gen. Xers about the nature of family. The boomers believed they were born into their family and, therefore, had no power to change it. The Xers, on the other hand, believed they had the authority to choose their family. The Xers cited examples of roles they had at church, where older people functioned as parental figures. They believed they had the authority and power to dispense with and create family. This

³ Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals*, 147.

⁴ See chapter four for ideas on how to exercise participatory leadership.

demonstrates the shift in power and authority—toward the individual.⁵ Robert Nash echo's McNeal's experience in his book *An 8-Track Church in a CD World*:

In the modern world, our communities were assigned to us. We were born into them and remained attached to them for the bulk of our lives. But in a postmodern world, we choose the communities with which we will affiliate.⁶

Freedom to choose one's community is a postmodern assumption that is changing the face of leadership in the Western church. Leaders cannot expect their congregations to follow them or listen to them simply because of their position. Postmoderns choose their communities and those whom they follow.

Many younger evangelical leaders are frustrated with the leadership models of both the traditional and the contemporary boomer church.⁷ Frustration is largely attributed to the manipulation of power in leadership. And while postmodernism or postmodern ideals will not eliminate manipulative power, a model that moves away from leadership autonomy toward collaboration in leadership will foster an environment where power becomes more difficult to abuse.

What is Collaborative Leadership

Collaborative leadership is defined as leading from within a community. Brian McLaren describes it as,

Less like the man behind the curtain in *The Wizard of Oz*, and more like young Dorothy, community leaders in the emerging culture will increasingly resemble the lead seeker in a journey, not possessing all the answers, but possessing a contagious passion to find a way home—and to bring others along in our common search for love, courage, wisdom, and home.⁸

⁵ McNeal, *A Work of Heart*, 83.

⁶ Nash, *An 8-Track Church in a CD World*, 101.

⁷ Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals*, 153.

⁸ Brian D. McLaren, "Emerging Values: The Next Generation is Redefining Spiritual Formation, Community, and Mission," *Leadership Journal* XXIV (Summer 2003): 38-39.

Relational Leadership

Relationships rather than tasks are central to collaborative leaders. God Himself exists as a collaborative, Trinitarian community: the Father, Son and Spirit work together at as unified whole to lead people into community.⁹ Jesus Christ offers a perfect example of a leader who used His power to draw people into community rather than to serve His own purposes. He possessed infinite power, yet set it aside to mingle with, serve alongside, and ultimately sacrifice Himself for, sinful human beings. The Apostle Paul's call to emulate Jesus' example of leadership is summarized in Phil. 2:5-8:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

By entering into the human community to experience life with other human beings, Jesus became the supreme example of a collaborative leader. He used his authority to serve, rather than be served by, those around Him. Just as Christ drew people to Himself, so collaborative leaders must draw people into the body of Christ, the Christian community, through conversation, listening, and loving service.

Team Leadership

Collaborative leaders invite others to participate in leadership and decision-making processes. Although decision-making processes in collaborative environments are often slower and more demanding, everyone's voice in the community is heard. This does not necessarily mean soliciting community feedback on every decision; it means recognizing that individuals find satisfaction and belonging when they are part of the

⁹ While the Trinity is vastly complex, the model illustrates the beauty of three distinct Persons who exist together as one Being. It offers, among others things, a model for human community.

decision making process. Collaborative leaders work with others to create community. Often those who serve along with the leader are vastly different than the leader herself. This demonstrates how the leader views their role, as one who empowers others.

The Dynamics of Power and Conflict in Collaborative Leadership

The Place of Power in Collaborative Leadership

Collaborative leadership means labouring together. Labouring together uses power creatively and selflessly. When it is channeled constructively, power serves people.

Power that Serves

Collaborative leaders look for opportunities to serve others. They organize themselves to effectively serve those whom they lead. Their leadership example resembles Jesus Christ. Their attitudes reflect Christ's, "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant..." (Phil. 2:6).

For leaders who want to build strong, self-sufficient organizations, serving those who are near the bottom of the leadership ladder is a low priority. The higher up the leadership pyramid one climbs, the stronger and more self-sufficient one must become. Modernist leadership guru, John Maxwell, writes about the need for strength in leadership. In his book, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, a leader's ability is rated according to a scale ranging from 1 (low leadership skill) to 10 (high leadership skill). He states "Because I've spent my whole life developing my leadership skills that has

made it possible for me to lead other strong leaders. People who are 9s and 10s don't follow a 7. That's just the way leadership works."¹⁰

Would Jesus agree? Jesus' leadership stemmed from his willingness to serve—not time spent developing skills. Leighton Ford offers a different picture of leadership when he sums up Jesus' vision, "He pictured his kingdom as a community of fellow servants in which the older would serve the younger; the greater the lesser; the powerful, the weaker."¹¹ Jesus is a perfect example of someone who possessed infinite power and authority yet used it to empower those around him, particularly the weak and marginalized. Jesus turned the power structures of his day upside down.

Postmoderns believe that a leader's authority is not found in status but in service. Their effectiveness hinges on one thing—a willingness to aid their community. Jesus modeled service when he washed his disciples' feet. Richard Foster writes, "The spiritual authority of Jesus is an authority not found in a position or a title, but in a towel."¹² Serving people uses power creatively by releasing them to be free to choose whether they want to follow the leader's example.

In a culture that looks with skepticism at the Canadian church, which has traditionally held a place of power in society, the task of the postmodern leader is to claim a place of service within their community. "The missional church and servant leadership is not 'me' or 'my' leadership," says Robert Webber, "it's more about God's

¹⁰ Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, 76.

¹¹ Leighton Ford, *Transforming Leadership: Jesus' Way of Creating Vision, Shaping Values and Empowering Change* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991), 151.

¹² Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 161.

mission in the world and how we all do it together.”¹³ Doing life and ministry together is the purpose of collaborative leadership.

Handling Conflict as a Collaborative Leader

Leadership involves dealing with relational conflict.¹⁴ Collaborative leadership, with its focus on a team approach rather than one individual, is all the more prone to relational conflict. This is particularly true for postmodern leaders who, given the diversity of Canadian culture, will need to understand the complexities of forming diverse communities.¹⁵ Diversity often brings significant tension and strain to the community. Yet conflict shapes leaders and communities. Unresolved conflict damages communities, so how can a postmodern leader be prepared to handle the dynamics of conflict that arise from leading collaboratively?

Handling Personal Conflict

Thomas à Kempis wrote, “A humble knowledge of thyself is a surer way to God than a deep search after learning.”¹⁶ And while leaders can learn from conflict around them, they must first begin by dealing with their inner conflict in order to gain a humble knowledge of themselves. A leader’s inner peace is the necessary precursor to peace in their community. Leighton Ford writes:

Leaders who want to transform conflict need to face their own inner wars; to know what it is to find acceptance with God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ; to understand that integrity comes in seeking as a priority the rule of God; and to draw on the power of God’s Spirit to overcome the ongoing conflict between the sinful nature and the new life in Christ (Rom 8:5-6).¹⁷

¹³ Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals*, 152.

¹⁴ Ford, *Transforming Leadership*, 251.

¹⁵ Chapter 7 will say more about leading diverse communities.

¹⁶ Quoted in Les Parrott and Leslie Parrott, *Relationships: An Open and Honest Guide to Making Bad Relationships Better and Good Relationships Great* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 33.

¹⁷ Ford, *Transforming Leadership*, 258.

The path to inner transformation can be long and arduous. Postmodern leaders must be willing, as Reggie McNeal puts it, to “ask themselves the tough questions.”¹⁸ Internal perfection is not, however, the goal of this process. Rather, the ideal is a humble self-understanding. Theological reflection is a necessary pathway to inner transformation, about which more will be said later in this chapter. Once the leader has begun to deal with their own conflict they are more ready to face their community’s conflict.

Handling Community Conflict

Community conflict is inevitable: it happens in marriages, families, the workplace, and churches. The only positive aspect of inevitable conflict is the opportunity to learn. Every conflict offers a learning opportunity. But where autonomous leaders use conflict as an opportunity for personal learning, collaborative leaders use conflict as a communal learning tool. When an argument erupted among the disciples about who would be the greatest in the kingdom of God, Jesus used a child as an illustration of the answer (Mark 9:33-37). He resolved the conflict creatively—by using a relational resource, a young boy. Collaborative leaders know that they, themselves, do not have to resolve the conflict. The problem can be solved collaboratively by relying on the resources of others in the community who are often more qualified and better equipped.

The Importance of Listening in Collaborative Leadership

At the heart of collaborative leadership is the art of listening. Whereas the role of church leaders in modernism has tended to focus on their ability to speak as God’s

¹⁸ McNeal, *A Work of Heart*, 162.

spokesperson for the congregation, the postmodern shift has fostered a culture where authority is given by the community to the one who best listens to that community and can articulate what they have heard. The leader must listen to their community in order to learn, grow, and speak from their participation in that community.

Listening to the Future (Vision)

Vision has been touted as the leader's greatest asset. Vision involves listening to the future. The leader's ability to discover and articulate a vision for the future collaboratively is a complex yet essential task. Where does the leader listen for the vision? Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus suggest that vision arises from the people who surround the leader:

Historians tend to write about great leaders as if they possessed transcendent genius, as if they were capable of creating their visions and sense of destiny out of some mysterious inner resource. Perhaps some do, but upon closer examination it usually turns out that the vision did not originate with the leader personally but rather from others.¹⁹

The leader must be willing to listen to the voices of others to discover a vision for the community. Discovering the vision communally will increase the potential for individual ownership.

According to George Barna, vision is communicated by God.²⁰ Sometimes God births a vision in a group and the leader gathers the pieces to create a uniform whole. Other times He plants a vision in a leader's heart to be confirmed later by the community. Alan Nelson writes, "A leader is a vision womb. Team members are vital midwives."²¹

¹⁹ Bennis and Nanus, *Leaders*, 88.

²⁰ George Barna, *The Power of Team Leadership: Finding Strength in Shared Responsibility* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2001), 43.

²¹ Nelson, *Spirituality and Leadership*, 165.

In both processes the leader must be listening astutely to two influences—God and people.

Bill Hybels adds that vision is a picture of the future that produces passion.²² It is the focal point around which the community gathers together. It allows a community to say “yes” to opportunities that will advance them toward their destination. It also allows them to say “no” to those things that would hold them back.

Since each community is unique, vision is community-specific. A vision that emerges from one congregation will not emerge identically in another even if the leader is the same. That is why leaders must listen to needs of their community and respect the diversity in that community when discerning God’s vision communally. In their book, *Future Faith Churches*, Don Posterski and Gary Nelson use these terms to describe the role of collaboration in congregational vision:

Future faith leaders do not come with a pre-packaged plan that must be bought by the congregation. The ups and downs of their own journey predispose them to expect similarly variable patterns in their parishioners. They are willing to share themselves in the discovery of what it means to be the church together. Their vulnerability gives permission for other to live transparently as a community of people and to discover together what faith can mean for them as a congregation.²³

God unifies diverse groups through a clear vision. In a collaborative environment listening to a diverse group for a common vision can be a trying and challenging task. Yet it is an opportunity for God to break through—bringing unity and agreement. One of the most helpful ways to nurture an environment of unity and agreement in a group is by reflecting on how God has been shaping that community historically. This can be

²² Hybels, *Courageous Leadership*, 32.

²³ Posterski and Nelson, *Future Faith Churches*, 88.

accomplished by relying on a discipline that has been developed in chapter five of this thesis, theological reflection.

Listening to the Past (Theological Reflection)

Theological reflection is an excellent learning discipline that is particularly helpful in times of conflict. Even as the communal vision discerning process requires God's cohesive presence, likewise theological reflection, whether practised in community or as an internal dialogue, must also be led by God. Robert Webber writes, "Theological reflection is guided by the Spirit and clarifies for the church the nature of God's person and work in history."²⁴

According to Joyce Bellous and Dan Sheffield, theological reflection unites thought, feeling and action by investigating a problem through a conversation we have with our selves (an internal dialogue), or by talking with others.²⁵ It is reflective. Therefore, it is a useful tool in examining and analyzing past behaviour with an aim to personal transformation. While theological reflection can be an inner-personal dialogue, the collaborative component will be examined in greater detail below.

Navigating Conflict using the Discipline of Theological Reflection

All leaders encounter disturbances, but the shift from modernism to postmodernism in particular creates disturbances on a grand scale. This shift represents an opportunity for congregational leaders to re-evaluate their priorities and worldview by using the discipline of theological reflection. Bellous and Sheffield explain that the process leading up to theological reflection generally follows this process: as people

²⁴ Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals*, 241.

²⁵ Bellous and Sheffield, *Learning the Art of Theological Reflection*, 5. In the previous chapter I suggested that theological reflection challenged the sacred/secular dichotomy that existed in modernism. I

experience life they organize those experiences into memories; they draw on those memories to form their worldview; when something happens that disturbs that worldview, dissonance occurs; dissonance can be channeled into growth. The leader must be committed to listening and reflecting on the situation that caused the conflict. Successful theological reflection occurs when all participants see the problem in a new way and allow their theological understanding of it to be altered. This happens either by acquiring new insights or by having new reasons for the position that they held at the outset.²⁶

Collaborative theological reflection creates a unique environment—one of openness and vulnerability. It allows the leader to learn and grow with their community. In their communal reflection they become open to being transformed by those whom they lead. Those who participate are able to gain access to the heart of the leader in her brokenness and frailty. Ideally, the leader and the team are together transformed by the Holy Spirit.

Listening to the Present (Model II Social Virtues)

The Canadian church needs leaders who listen to the people around them. I have called this “listening to the present.” When leaders listen to the people around them they open themselves to learn from their community. As a young man, Jesus modeled this form of learning in the temple courts where he was found by his parents, “sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions” (Luke 2:46). Jesus knew the importance of communal listening for personal formation. By listening to the teachers he

briefly offered a definition for theological reflection and looked at only one of its facets—the spiritual conversation or dialogue.

²⁶ Bellous and Sheffield, *Learning the Art of Theological Reflection*, 34.

demonstrated the importance of community rather than isolation in the discipleship process.

Listening to the present entails more than hearing what someone is saying. It involves being willing to change one's beliefs and behaviour when new information is presented that suggests change is needed. This is exemplified in the difference between what Anita Farber-Robertson calls Model I and Model II social virtues.²⁷ Although Model I social virtues tend to be our default response, they do not create an environment of learning for either the leader or community. Those who use Model II social virtues however, create a climate where listening to the present becomes second nature. Farber-Robertson writes:

There is a way of moving, being, and interacting with the world that is both rule-bound and open to learning. The rules, rather than serving rigidly to maintain the world as we know it or believe it to be, serve to help us hold that world and its meanings up to careful scrutiny and reexamination. The rules of Model II social virtues presume a learning, seeking practitioner who is more interested in discovering the truth than in being right, more interested in being effective than in having control.²⁸

Generally speaking, modernist leadership structures allowed autonomous leaders to control rather than collaborate. Not every modernist leader controlled those around them but there was less of a need to work with a team and as a result, being right and having control were natural leadership tendencies. Postmodernism has created a culture where listening to and learning from one's community is a necessary precursor to serving as a leader in that setting. Therefore, Model II social virtues can be embraced as a new

²⁷ For a brief overview of how these virtues differ see the section in chapter four of this thesis, "*Implications for Discipleship in Learning Communities.*"

²⁸ Farber-Robertson, *Learning While Leading*, 30.

framework for listening to a group, team or community. Leaders who practise Model II social virtues act with purpose and humility.

While many leaders have formed their opinions about people and the world, collaborative leaders are in the process of forming their opinions. They always have at least one ear open to the present conversation, trying to gain new insight and understanding about the evolving world. This is an essential leadership trait when navigating the challenges of community conflict. By setting aside personal opinions and biases a leader will be better able to listen for insight from all parties involved. This will not be easy. In fact, it will probably take a lifetime to master. But in a postmodern community, a leader who attempts to live from a Model II framework and fails will be further ahead than a leader who is successful in constantly being right.

Summary

Postmoderns do not typically want to follow those who harness power and use it for their own benefit. They are looking for a leadership culture in which they can contribute—a culture of collaboration. As Robert Nash writes, “A kind of ‘hands-on’ involvement in church leadership is emerging. Postmodern church members want to be involved in decision-making processes, small group ministries, worship leadership, and mission opportunities.”²⁹ The autonomous leadership ideals of modernism will no longer create the same results they once did. Postmoderns are looking for leaders who live and serve as Jesus did, from within the community.

Collaboration in leadership means understanding the proper place of power is in the hands of the community. When leaders purposely look for opportunities to serve and

²⁹ Nash, *An 8-Track Church in a CD World*, 104.

empower the people around them, they turn the hierarchical leadership pyramid, upside down. Collaborative leadership uses power to serve rather than oppress.

Collaborative leadership embraces conflict as a natural part of community life. Leaders strive to resolve their own internal conflict before attempting to facilitate conflict resolution in their broader community. When they do encounter conflict in their community, collaborative leaders harness and rely on the communal resources. They know that they may not be the best person needed to bring resolution to the conflict.

Collaborative leaders know the power of listening. They have learned the art of listening to the past, present and future.

By listening to the past, collaborative leaders employ the discipline of theological reflection in order that they might find a better way through conflict and dissonance. By reflecting on past events and behaviours, a group can discover pathways through conflict when misunderstandings are reinterpreted in light of new evidence. This is particularly relevant to the postmodern leader who is wrestling with the upheaval created in the transition between modernism and postmodernism. Together, the leader and community listen to each other and the Holy Spirit as a means of mutual transformation in times of conflict and change.

Listening to the present involves integrating Model II social virtues into the leader's everyday thought pattern. Model II creates an opportunity where the leader can learn "on the fly" by listening to their inner thought patterns. It also allows leaders to move from a need to "be right" toward an openness in discovering truth.

Collaborative leaders know that listening to the future involves listening for a collectively held vision. Rather than being the leader's idea, collaborative leaders discern

the community vision from those who are part of the community. Since postmodernism is fluid and vision has the potential to “be all over the place,” the leader’s task is to draw out the communal vision by gathering the commonly held ideals, confirming them with the biblical narrative and rallying the community around that unfolding picture.

I believe postmodern church leaders are called to collaborate with their communities. While this is not an easy task, it is an essential step in the postmodern church’s movement toward a counter-cultural witness. By transitioning away from the modernist business model of leadership, the postmodern leader can embrace a new framework that is relational and uniquely postmodern. The task of collaborative leadership is made even more difficult when the following chapter’s subject becomes a leadership priority as well—the cultivation of diverse communities. To lead a missional church that is ethnically, spirituality and generationally diverse is no easy calling; it is however, the calling of the postmodern church leader.

SEVEN

THE MISSIONAL LEADER: RECONCILING CULTURES, CLASSES AND CONCEPTS OF GOD'S KINGDOM

“Missional” is the latest buzz word in the contemporary Western church. Apart from being an innovative term, does it mean something to postmoderns? “Missional churches see themselves not so much as sending, as being sent,”¹ writes Lois Barrett, “The church does not exist for itself, but for participation in God’s mission of reconciliation.”² Reconciliation is one of the most important aspects of missional churches. While the modernist Western church has focused on reconciling people to God, its hierarchical structures have impeded reconciliation between diverse groups of people. Its vision of creating a harmonious cultural ideal has favoured one learning style and type of person, thus excluding alternative approaches and those who use them. Most churches in Canada are ethnically homogeneous and yet are still conflict laden. I believe the postmodern Canadian church’s transformational impact is directly related to its ability to demonstrate communal reconciliation. In order to live God’s vision of reconciliation, the Canadian church will have to break down the walls between classes, races, religions, and generations. Destroying walls means being intentional about “being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose” (Phil. 2:1), which, Paul says, comes from fellowship with the Spirit. Fellowship with the Spirit fosters inclusive,

¹ Lois Y. Barrett et al., *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), x.

² Barrett et al., *Treasure in Clay Jars*, ix.

unified communities where diversity is valued and embraced. For this to happen, churches must be led by missional leaders who have a vision for reconciliation.

The modern mega church movement has—in certain of its manifestations—tended to funnel people into homogeneous church groups. People have been encouraged to participate in groups with those from similar ethnic origins; people of similar ages have been invited to do the same. This ideology has been grounded on the modernist principle that uniformity breeds harmony.³ By building churches with people who are ethnically and culturally similar and nurturing groups where people at similar life stages could gather and grow, discipleship in these contexts has not included the hard task of reconciliation between diverse groups of people. Has the modernist, Western church settled for a discipleship model that neglects the heart of Jesus' mission of reconciliation? In his book, *The Multicultural Leader*, Dan Sheffield quotes African-American pastor John Perkins' sharp critique of the church's homogeneity principle:

Today Christians study the science of withdrawing from others and then use it to attract converts. This so-called church growth or homogeneous principle should make us question the church the same way we question dehumanizing ghettos...Homogeneity does not mirror the image of God. It cheapens the people who proclaim it and mocks God's call for us to be agents of reconciliation. What makes it even more harmful is how it is justified: 'if we are segregated, more people will come and hear the gospel, which in turn, advances the kingdom of God.' This logic spits in the face of a holy God by playing to our human weaknesses and sin nature. At the same time that it increases the size of our churches' membership, it retards our spiritual growth.⁴

In order to nurture genuine growth, the missional leader will be called to model the hard road of intentional, intergenerational, intercultural dialogue that bridges socio-economic

³ See the section entitled, "*The Harmony of Uniformity*" in chapter 1 for a fuller description of this phrase.

⁴ John Perkins, *Beyond Charity: The Call to Christian Community Development* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 49. Quoted in Sheffield, *The Multicultural Leader*, 37-38.

classes. Then the leader must move beyond the initial stage of dialogue into an authentic, shared relationship with those who are different. Cultivating congregational diversity will be the missional leader's focus. An examination of missional leadership and its implications for the leader and her community will be the focus of this chapter.

I will begin by examining the need for multicultural churches in Canada. I will argue that a church where people from multiple cultures mingle is a church that is demonstrating God's kingdom on Earth. I will rely primarily on Dan Sheffield's book, *The Multicultural Leader*, in laying a framework for multicultural congregations and leadership.

Another way of becoming a missional leader is by creating space where the rich and poor can enter into relationship with each other. The missional church has an opportunity to live God's kingdom reality that offers the rich and poor equal footing and gives the poor opportunity to help the rich just as much as the rich help the poor. This practice creates a mutual learning environment where rich and poor depend on one another.

A final aspect of being missional involves a perspective shift from seeing non-Christians as outsiders to seeing them as fellow journeyers on life's path. The modernist church looked at non-Christians and people of other faiths as "outsiders"; the task of the missional, postmodern church is to replace the labels, which can often be misleading and isolating, with language that is more inclusive and accurately describes the fluid and complex nature of Christian discipleship.

Cultivating Cultural Diversity

One of the ways that missional postmodern leaders can cultivate a biblically counter-cultural community is by being intentional about fostering a multicultural congregation. Multicultural congregations have a unique but difficult opportunity to live out what the Apostle Paul says has been accomplished in Christ: “For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph. 2:14). Fostering peace where hostility once resided, is the complex task of the missional leader seeking to nurture a multicultural congregation. Missional leaders fight against the innate response—to retreat into one’s own cultural group—in order to see multicultural relationships formed. In some rural contexts, where there is only minimal cultural diversity, this could be an impossible task; but particularly in urban Canadian settings, the missional leader’s task is to be an agent of cultural reconciliation. This does not mean inviting people of other ethnic origins into a homogeneous church, rather it means cultivating congregational inclusion—where everyone’s ideas and influences, regardless of race, background or cultural biases—are valued. According to Dan Sheffield, “It is a space where everyone’s unique contribution is necessary and essential to the proper functioning of the whole.”⁵ Being part of the whole is why many people seek community in the first place. Including and valuing those who are different is the first step in forming a multicultural community.

Are multicultural churches really necessary in Canada? I believe they are, for two reasons: First, multicultural churches are living proof of God’s kingdom of reconciliation

⁵ Sheffield, *The Multicultural Leader*, 31.

and second, as it was in the modernist era, Canada is still a global example of multiculturalism.

Multicultural Churches as proof of God's Kingdom of Reconciliation

Canadians need more than just multicultural churches; our nation needs multicultural churches demonstrating reconciliation, between people and their God. This reality must be at the heart of the missional leader's commitment to cultivating a multicultural church. God's mission of reconciliation is stated by the Apostle Paul when he writes about the implications of Jesus' death on a cross for the Jews and Gentiles: "His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility" (Eph. 2:15a-16). And Paul goes even further in 2 Corinthians to call God's people to the ministry of reconciliation, "And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19). Missional churches are communities where people are being reconciled to God and one another. They are characterized by a message and ministry of cultural, ethnic and spiritual reconciliation. Missional reconciliation is described by the Apostle Paul in Colossians 3:11, "Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all." As stated by F. F. Bruce, Paul's example of barbarian and Scythian are particularly fitting in reference to multicultural reconciliation:

Greeks divided the human race into two camps—Greeks and barbarians... Among the barbarians the Scythians had for long been looked on as particularly outlandish. "Scythian" is not set here in antithesis to "barbarian"; it intensifies the concept expressed by "barbarian."... "Scythian" had been a byword for

uncultured barbarism.... But the gospel overrides cultural frontiers; they have no place in the Christian church.⁶

Reconciliation that is rooted in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ abolishes the cultural distinctions and classifications that offer personal and communal identity. Christ Himself relativizes ethnic and cultural differences and welcomes people into a new community of “unity in diversity” called the Church. There people are identified, not based on their cultural heritage or practices, but based purely on Christ’s gracious gift of life.

How does a postmodern leader nurture this type of cultural reconciliation?

Sheffield offers two helpful characteristics in cultivating and nurturing multicultural communities: inclusion without giving up one’s cultural heritage and a willingness to surrender one’s cultural biases.

Inclusion

Referring to multicultural communities, Sheffield writes, “Such communities recognize the need for intercultural dialogue in which people of diverse ethnic backgrounds maintain a sense of cultural identity as a means of validating their voice—their uniqueness.”⁷ Offering someone a place in a community while demanding they abandon their cultural heritage is not a demonstration of God’s kingdom. A demonstration of God’s kingdom happens through what Sheffield calls “mutual critique”: “The inclusive leader has learned the deeply spiritual activity of ‘mutual critique.’ Giving and receiving constructive criticism calls for adjustment of identity around

⁶ F. F Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 149-50.

⁷ Sheffield, *The Multicultural Leader*, 48.

culturally determined values and practices, and the negotiation of shared meanings.”⁸

When a leader is able to give and receive constructive criticism to and from someone with a different cultural heritage, the leader is on the road to being inclusive.

Postmodern leaders must move beyond dialogue with people from other cultures, they must be prepared to move action, since as Sheffield notes, “The manner in which leaders conduct themselves interculturally will have direct correspondence to congregational life.”⁹ A leader who is open to talking with people from other cultural backgrounds yet is unwilling to allow intercultural experiences to form and transform community life is not likely to form a fully multicultural congregation. Only when cultural biases are acknowledged and laid down at the feet of Jesus will a leader and congregation begin to move from dialogue into what many postmoderns long to experience, a genuine reconciliation across cultural boundaries.

Surrendering Cultural Biases

Postmodern leaders will have to get used to the practice of surrendering their own cultural biases. This is because postmoderns hold a vast spectrum of ideologies and beliefs about their shifting culture: since it is continually evolving it is impossible to hold to one cultural idea too long. In reference to intercultural dialogue, it is paramount that leaders not assume their Christological paradigm is any more valuable or correct than the perspective of someone from a different cultural origin who is part of their community.¹⁰ Sheffield writes, “The multicultural congregation, in particular, requires that power be de-centralized, so that all those sitting around the table are recognized as having a valid

⁸ Sheffield, *The Multicultural Leader*, 96.

⁹ Sheffield, *The Multicultural Leader*, 63.

¹⁰ I am referring to a context where Christians from different backgrounds and cultures gather together rather than a community where interreligious dialogue is taking place.

voice, equal in value and worth to the community as a whole.”¹¹ By surrendering his cultural bias, the leader can be open to radically new possibilities and ways of seeing the world. “[Multicultural leaders] need to move from ‘ethnocentrism’ in their worldview to ‘ethno-relativism’—to hear the other fully without passing judgment,” writes Sheffield. Only when leaders admit that their way of seeing the world might not be the only possible perspective, can they be effective multicultural leaders in postmodern Canada.

Canada as a Global Example of Multiculturalism

One of the greatest assets of Canadian culture is its multicultural nature. In writing about the inclusion of ethnic communities into Canadian culture, Michael Adams says,

It is not an exclusive disjunction, in which one is *either* ethnic or Canadian: one can comfortably be both, and the very Canadian trend toward more flexible personalities and a diffused sense of identity suggests that the recognition of a multicultural, fluid and flexible reality need not encourage an ossified ethnic tribalism.¹²

If Adams is correct, and I believe he is, Canadians are happy with the flexibility of multiculturalism. And while more and more ethnic mingling is taking place in classrooms, factories and businesses across Canada, there are very few examples of multicultural churches. The church is called to create a culture where God’s mission is fulfilled; yet it seems as though postmodern Canadian society is ahead of the church in creating a culture where people of various ethnic backgrounds work and play together.

Now is the time for the Canadian church to become more intentional about nurturing multicultural relationships through heterogeneous congregations: relationships that move beyond superficial tolerance to a place where relationships are formed based

¹¹ Sheffield, *The Multicultural Leader*, 72.

¹² Adams, *Sex in the Snow*, 171.

on a commitment to reconciliation. If the churches in Canada—one of the most multicultural nations in the world—do not become more committed to nurturing culturally diverse churches, then I believe we will miss the unique opportunity to demonstrate God’s heart for racial and ethnic reconciliation to the global Church. The Canadian church has an important calling and opportunity that has been provided by our government—to create unity between diverse people groups in our nation.

Cultivating Relationships between Rich and Poor

Missional leaders build bridges between those who are affluent and those who are impoverished. But the bridges are not one-way-only where the rich channel impersonal resources to the poor via local missions; missional bridges are shared between the rich and poor, allowing ministry to flow mutually from one to the other.

Money divides people into classes. As a result, the rich and poor are distanced from each other. Personally speaking, I get uncomfortable around poor people. I would rather meet someone who is well dressed with neatly combed hair than someone missing teeth who smells of last week’s garbage. James’ words penetrate my shallow spirituality when he states, “If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, ‘Here’s a good seat for you,’ but say to the poor man, ‘You stand there’ or ‘Sit on the floor by my feet,’ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?” (James 2:3-4). Could the god of money have blinded those of us who are rich into believing we are closer to God than the poor? Richard Foster challenges the traditional Western idea of conversion and discipleship in his book, *The Challenge of the Disciplined Life*:

For Christ money is an idolatry we must be converted from in order to be converted to him. The rejection of the god mammon is a necessary

precondition to becoming a disciple of Jesus. And in point of fact, money has many of the characteristics of deity. It gives us security, can induce guilt, gives us freedom, gives us power and seems to be omnipresent. Most sinister of all, however, is its bid for omnipotence.¹³

In the Western church's quest for status and influence in society, could it have forsaken its call to learn the ways of the poor?

Jesus spent time befriending the poor and marginalized during his time on Earth.

His mission statement, taken from the book of Isaiah, was a commitment to the poor and oppressed:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:18-19)

I once heard someone who works with the poor in Vancouver say that Jesus could have been called a friend *to* sinners; but that was not the term used in reference to Him.

Referring to Jesus, the Pharisees said, "Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend *of* tax collectors and sinners" (Luke 7:34 *italics mine*). Jesus saw Himself as one of the people in the lowest segment of society; He mingled with them; He befriended them; He learned from them and called others to do the same.¹⁴

The call of the missional leader is to level the relational gap that exists between the rich and poor. It is not to make everyone poor but to create equality between classes.

I propose three ways the missional leader can begin to cultivate that type of equality:

first, confess the sin of greed; second, interact relationally with the poor; and third,

interact resourcefully with the poor.

¹³ Foster, *The Challenge of the Disciplined Life*, 28.

¹⁴ There are numerous references that demonstrate Jesus call for people to learn from society's outsiders: Matt. 26:6-13; Luke 7:36-48; Matt. 18:2-4.

Confess the Sin of Greed

Confessing the sin of greed is the first step in nurturing a mutually beneficial interaction between the rich and the poor. In a society such as Canada, both the rich and poor are likely willing participants in the greed of consumerism. The damage created by greed is deeper than material possessions; it is an attitude and a mindset that dominates the lives of both rich and poor. I believe the consumerist thrust of Western society has fostered the idea that wealth is more important than people—whether family, friends or strangers. Tom Sine describes the typical Western Christian’s priorities:

Everyone knows that getting ahead in the job comes first. Getting ahead in the suburbs comes first. Getting the kids off to their activities comes first. And we tend to make decisions in these areas pretty much like everyone else does, based on our income, our professions, and our social status.¹⁵

Sine is describing what most affluent Christians—if we were totally honest—believe to be important in life. More than anything, Sine’s comments signal a need for confession and repentance in the Western church. We need to abandon our lofty ideas and frail attempts at building a powerful church in order that we might listen to the voice of Christ, confessing our greed and allowing His priorities to become our own. Only then will the rich and poor be able to interact as brothers and sisters in a community of equality.

A Relational Interaction with the Poor

We have all heard the phrase, “talk is cheap”; but it is the most valuable offering someone who is affluent could receive from someone who is poor. If the affluent begin to listen and interact with the poor, they will be changed and transformed. Turning again to Richard Foster, we find that he advocates building relationships to learn from the poor:

Let us discover ways to get in touch with the poor. One of the most damaging things affluence does is allow us to distance ourselves from the poor so we no

¹⁵ Sine, *Mustard Seed Vs. McWorld*, 155.

longer see their pain. We then can create an illusionary world that prevents us from evaluating life in the light of 'love our neighbour.'

What can we do? We can make a conscious choice to be among the poor, not to preach to them but to learn from them.¹⁶

When the Western church abandons the status and safety that affluence brings in favour of embracing the poor and oppressed as equals then the church will be one step closer to fulfilling Jesus' mission. It starts with building relationships with the poor. It begins when the church listens to the pain and loneliness of the poor. It starts when the poor feel welcomed as equals into missional communities in Canada. This is a particularly difficult but no less essential task of every missional leader. Henri Nouwen offers insight on how leaders should interact with those whom they serve:

We are not the healers, we are not the reconcilers, we are not the givers of life. We are sinful, broken, vulnerable people who need as much care as anyone we care for. The mystery of ministry is that we have been chosen to make our own limited and very conditional love the gateway for the unlimited and unconditional love of God. Therefore, true ministry must be mutual.¹⁷

Mutual ministry between the rich and poor is central to missional living. While this type of living starts with relationships, it finds its fulfillment when the wealthy and the poor share their resources with one another.

A Resourceful Interaction with the Poor

I believe part of the missional church's calling is to invest their resources in building relationships between the rich and the poor. One of the best ways this is accomplished is through giving. Giving provides for both the giver and the recipient: the recipient gets the benefit of whatever material resources are given (money, food, shelter, occupation...), while the giver gets the benefit of joy and freedom from the power of consumerism. I love what Richard Foster says about money:

¹⁶ Foster, *The Challenge of the Disciplined Life*, 34.

¹⁷ Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 43-44.

So step on it. Yell at it. Laugh at it... And engage in the most profane act of all—give it away. The powers that energize money cannot abide that most unnatural of acts, giving. Money is made for taking, for bargaining, for manipulating, but not for giving. This is exactly why giving has such ability to defeat the powers of money.¹⁸

The dominant cultural value of wealth and status stands in the way of many Western Christians giving their wealth to help those in need. Foster's ideas may seem simple but to give wealth into the hands of those who have none can break down, "the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph. 2:14) that often exists between people of different socio-economic classes.

While giving money is one example of how the affluent can help the poor, it can also have damaging effects by allowing the poor to become dependent on the rich to take care of them. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore the ways to ensure this does not happen, I do believe that it is imperative that the poor be responsible to contribute to the welfare of the community themselves. It may not take the form of financial compensation but there are other ways they can make valuable and necessary investments in community life. A good principle for offering resources to the poor is found in Leviticus 23:22: "When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God." The Israelites were not told to reap and glean for the poor but to provide places where the poor could reap and glean themselves. Creating opportunities for the poor to offer dignified work for resources is something that would greatly benefit both the rich and poor in Canada and globally.

Offering resources to people who are poor is only one way to look after them;

¹⁸ Foster, *The Challenge of the Disciplined Life*, 61.

using the power of influence is another. What would happen if affluent Christians demanded equal rights for their impoverished neighbours? What if political leaders heard from society's wealthiest Christians that they did not think the poor in their communities were being heard, simply because they were poor? In missional communities, those who are wealthy have a responsibility to be the voice of the poor. Proverbs 31:9 says, "Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy." While this is an ancient command, it demands contemporary action. One person who is the voice of the poor these days is the lead singer from the band U2, Bono. Bono has spoken openly with national leaders like Paul Martin and George Bush as well as some of the most powerful and influential people outside the political realm, such as Oprah Winfrey and Bill Gates. He has committed much of his time and energy to being a voice for the voiceless in a crusade to eliminate global poverty and hunger.

Sharing resources, monetary or otherwise, and using one's wealth¹⁹ and affluence to be a voice for the poor are two of the many ways the missional church can cultivate and nurture a community of equality between socio-economic classes.

Destroying the Insider/Outsider Mentality

In the book, *A New Kind of Christian*, Neo challenges his friend's assumption about friendship evangelism:

"[Friendship evangelism] can prostitute friendship, which in my mind then invalidates the evangelism. If I'm going to pretend to be somebody's friend just so I can try to proselytize them, well, I might as well be selling soap. No, it's worse than that. At least when I'm selling soap, I'm not degrading the soap by exploiting the friendship."²⁰

¹⁹ One example of this is when Jesus challenges people to use their wealth to gain friends, "I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings" (Luke 16:9).

²⁰ McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian*, 104.

I attended a Campus Crusade for Christ rally in Indianapolis, Indiana in the late nineteen-nineties. One of the conference programmes involved learning the four spiritual laws so we could go door-to-door converting people to Jesus Christ as we went. I never knew a single person whose door I knocked on but I somehow believed the task of evangelism was more important than getting to know the people at the doors I visited. I never gave any thought to the possibility that I was marketing my “product” no differently than someone selling vacuum cleaners or soap. I believed that I was a “spiritual insider” and that the people of Indianapolis were probably outsiders who “needed God in their hearts”. I shudder to think how judgmental and arrogant I was during that time in my life but I believe that insider/outsider perception held by many Western Christians. Spencer Burke quotes a blogger named groovythpstr in his book, *Making Sense of Church*:

Let’s forget about WWJD bracelets and Christian T-shirts that try to reduce the mystery of our faith down to a simple slogan... Let’s stop trying to force people or argue with people about why we are right because that doesn’t really lead anyone into a relationship. Too many times we followers of Jesus Christ come off as arrogant, dogmatic, snotty know-it-alls. It isn’t that non-believers don’t want anything to do with God; they usually don’t want anything to do with us and our darn churches.²¹

Burke suggests the reason people respond in this way is because many in the Western church have been taught to aggressively win people to Christ, as if a rational decision automatically made them a disciple of Jesus. Instead of an in-or-out mentality, the above blogger suggests that, “Salvation is past, present, and future and is a lot more important than how we have treated it in the past.”²² Many pietistic churches have tended to reduce salvation down to a personal decision and a short prayer. That has resulted in a highly

²¹ Burke, *Making Sense of Church*, 150-51.

²² Burke, *Making Sense of Church*, 150.

privatized, individualistic, and exclusive concept of salvation; it is a concept that is being challenged by postmodern, missional leaders.

The Personal Saviour, Community, and the Kingdom of God

The postmodern, missional leader must possess a kingdom mentality. Whereas the modernist church drew people out of the world and into its safe system, where one's personal spirituality was central, the missional church must seek and receive God's kingdom in the world. "The church does not possess God's reign, it is to be possessed by it,"²³ says Craig Van Gelder. He notes that the usual terms used to describe the relationship between church and God's kingdom are, 'build, extend, promote, and establish'; but biblical language used for that same relationship are words such as, 'receive, enter, seek, and inherit.'²⁴

The difficult task of missional leaders is balancing what it means to be part of the kingdom of God. On the one hand it is an individual choice, calling each person to account based on the person and work of Jesus Christ. Yet it is also communal and involves a gathering of people who share a common commitment to Jesus Christ. Finally, God's kingdom is also an eternal, cosmic reign that is beyond space and time. It is a global movement that will be fully realized when Christ returns to usher in a new era.

The postmodern approach to seeking God's kingdom must be one in which the church actively participates in the world, offering hope and freedom to those who are outside God's kingdom. Rather than seeing them as outsiders, the postmodern leader must see all people as fellow journeyers. Rather than seeing non-Christians as potential

²³ Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 88.

²⁴ Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 87.

converts, the postmodern leader must engage in conversations and friendships with those who may or may not embrace Jesus Christ. As the character Neo states:

“Actually, if there’s one thing I wish I could tell every Christian about evangelism in the postmodern world,’ he replied, ‘it would be about [conversation]. I would say to stop counting conversions, because our whole approach to conversion is so, I don’t know, mechanistic and consumeristic and individualist and controlling. Instead, I’d encourage us to count conversations, because conversation implies a real relationship, and if we make our goal to establish relationships and engage in authentic conversations, I know that conversions will happen.”²⁵

Conversation is one of the postmodern leader’s most important missional tools in forming relationships with those outside the church. By focusing on conversations rather than conversions, the postmodern leader moves from peddling the kingdom of God as a broker to inviting others into a mutual exploration of the kingdom of God.

Central to breaking down the insider/outsider mentality of the modernist, Western church will be the transition toward seeing the church’s role as seeking and entering the kingdom of God, rather than as a broker of that kingdom. The missional leader will be called to lead the way in the world as a conversational kingdom-seeker. As the leader embraces people as part of her missional calling, the world will become the church and seeking God’s kingdom—as one who is on a journey with insiders and outsiders—will be a natural part of life in that kingdom.

Summary

Missional churches take reconciliation seriously. In this chapter I have argued that missional churches are churches that are active in reconciling broken relationships between cultures and races, between socio-economic classes, and between the church and the world.

²⁵ McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian*, 108-109.

Missional leaders are people who understand that their cultural interpretations are not always right; and even when they are right, they know that there could be other right perspectives as well. Missional leaders are multicultural leaders. Multicultural leaders are inclusive and open to surrendering their cultural biases. I believe Canadian churches have a unique opportunity to be a global example of what it means to cultivate a culture of intercultural reconciliation.

Missional leaders are people who push for equality between the rich and poor. Whereas the modernist, Western church emphasized the need for the rich to help the poor, the postmodern church sees the contributions of those who are poor as being equally valuable for Christian discipleship. The transition toward equality between the rich and the poor begins when the affluent, Western church confesses its sin of greed. As part of its transformation, the missional church and its leaders must offer not only resources to the poor, but the hand of friendship as well.

Missional leaders view their call to evangelize as part of living in God's kingdom rather than as a task to be carried out in the world. The missional church sees itself as "being possessed by the kingdom" rather than being the kingdom broker. Rather than using activist terms to describe the relationship between the church and God's kingdom, the missional church can be described as seeking and entering God's kingdom. By seeking God's kingdom, the missional leader can move from a conversion oriented ministry to a place where conversation with others is an active and valuable part of kingdom ministry.

Missional leaders focus their attention on the big picture of God's kingdom. They are interested in a ministry of reconciliation across all boundaries and lines. But

reconciliation comes at a price for the leader. The leader must be prepared to trust, not in their power, strength, status and abilities, but in their weakness, vulnerability and brokenness. One of the greatest differences between modernist leaders and their postmodern counterparts will be the postmodern leader's call to vulnerability and weakness. It is to these traits that we now turn.

EIGHT

THE VULNERABLE LEADER: NURTURING THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES OF SILENCE & SOLITUDE, SUBMISSION AND CONFESSION

As noted earlier, one of the most neglected leadership characteristics in the church today is vulnerability and authenticity. At least among postmodern congregants vulnerable leaders cultivate congregational trust. Vulnerability is the most difficult to cultivate of all the leadership characteristics developed in this thesis. Yet it also holds the greatest potential for community impact. I left this leadership characteristic until the end as a way of integrating my experiences with what I am writing: my finite knowledge on this subject compounded with my exhaustion from writing allows me to experience my weakness as a vehicle for spiritual formation. This chapter, unlike the other seven, is being fleshed out as I write and reflect on my own journey into weakness and vulnerability. There have been times I wondered if I would make it to the end of this massive project. There have been times when I questioned my ability to research and whether I was adequately prepared to write each chapter in this thesis. Now, as I write this concluding chapter I have a better understanding of Paul's paradoxical words to the Corinthians: "For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). In this sense, I am attempting to live out another important postmodern principle—that learning takes place especially in the course of reflection on experience, including the experience of weakness.

At least for postmoderns, vulnerability is a greater leadership asset than decades of seminary training, a dynamic personality, and previous examples of fruitful ministry—combined. Yet it comes at a price, the price of personal relevance in ministry. Henri Nouwen once wrote, “I am deeply convinced that the Christian leader of the future is called to be completely irrelevant and to stand in this world with nothing to offer but his or her own vulnerable self.”¹ When a leader is willing to live and lead in weakness and vulnerability then relevance is no longer necessary. At its best, weakness allows Christ’s power to break through. The modernist, Western church’s leadership priority—exemplified by Maxwell—was to develop strong, competent leaders; I believe the postmodern leadership priority should be nurturing weak, vulnerable, irrelevant leaders whose ministries are based in the biblical paradox of 1 Cor. 1:27-29:

But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

Rather than looking for strong, competent leaders, the postmodern church would be wise to look for those who lack personal charisma and relevance but who understand the call to foolishness and vulnerability. Again, these are not ends in themselves, but windows and doors—as in the example of Henri Nouwen—into the empowering and meaning-making grace of God in Christ.

Jesus himself modeled vulnerability and weakness as an example of how the church is to interact with the world. Unfortunately, the church has rarely embraced that role. Henri Nouwen provides a perfect example of how the church is called to interact with the world in his book, *In the Name of Jesus*. The example he provides is in

¹ Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 17.

reference to his transition from Harvard, one of America's premiere, Ivy League schools, to L'Arche in Toronto, a community established to care for adults who are mentally handicapped. Nouwen's personal example is a beautiful parallel of how the church is called to interact with the world: "so, I moved from Harvard to L'Arche, from the best and brightest, wanting to rule the world, to men and women who had few or no words and were considered, at best, marginal to the needs of our society."² Nouwen is not only describing his own journey—from power to weakness, scholar to servant of the marginalized—he is also describing the path of the postmodern church. He is describing the tension between what people wanted Jesus to be and who He actually was. He is describing the life of radical discipleship: a life where individual power, fame and success mean nothing to society's powerless; a life where vulnerability and weakness is a springboard for discipleship and community transformation.

Nurturing Vulnerability and Weakness through Practising the Spiritual Disciplines

This chapter will focus on three of the classical spiritual disciplines as a means of nurturing a healthy approach to leadership vulnerability and weakness.³ I will begin by examining the disciplines of silence and solitude, since these are crucial in promoting the inner transformation of postmodern leaders.

Following those disciplines, I will also explore the discipline of submission as a way of leading counter-culturally. The postmodern leader will be called to abandon ideas of power and glory in order to enter into a practice of living in submission to their

² Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 11.

³ Foster states, "They are not classical merely because they are ancient... The Disciplines are classical because they are *central* to experiential Christianity." Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 1.

community. This is not to say the leader is powerless, in fact the opposite is true: leaders who practise submission are people who are not obsessed with having their own way in leadership. Richard Foster notes that all disciplines have a corresponding freedom, “What freedom corresponds to submission? It is the ability to lay down the terrible burden of always needing to get our own way.”⁴

Finally, I will examine the discipline of confession as a means of cultivating communal vulnerability. While all of the disciplines outlined above are challenging, communal confession will be the most difficult to nurture. While the other disciplines are dependent on the leader’s willingness to practise them, the leader can only model corporate confession; if the congregation does not follow suit, the leader cannot force them to do so.

By integrating these disciplines into the fabric of their own lives, postmodern leaders will learn what it means to lead from a place of weakness and vulnerability instead of their natural strength and ministry abilities.

The Leader’s Inner Transformation: Silence and Solitude

Discovering Identity through Solitude

Solitude has been called, “the furnace of transformation.”⁵ It strains against our natural human tendency to find value and worth in what others say about us. Our identities are often built on what the voices of society tell us. To enter into solitude is scary because it means leaving the safety and identity offered to us by community. Solitude cordons off space where another voice can be heard, the voice of God. It is only

⁴ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 140.

⁵ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart: Desert Spirituality and Contemporary Ministry* (New York: Seabury, 1981), 25.

in solitude that we find God describing to us a new identity. It is the place where a leader can discover their true self.

While solitude allows a leader to be shaped and renewed in communion with God, it is a challenging discipline. It is lonely, isolating and can lead one to a spiritual desert.

Richard Foster notes that solitude often results in disappointment:

When solitude is seriously pursued, there is usually a flush of initial success and then an inevitable letdown—and with it a desire to abandon the pursuit altogether. Feelings leave and there is the sense that we are not getting through to God.⁶

Very few people are willing to be alone. To intentionally remove oneself from the praise and admiration offered by others demands courage and confidence. Yet those who are afraid to be alone are in danger. Henri Nouwen summarizes the implications of neglecting solitude when he writes, “Without solitude we remain victims of our society and continue to be entangled in the illusions of the false self.”⁷ Unfortunately, many people in today’s busy society are caught in the lie of believing that they can grow and discover themselves without the discipline of solitude. Yet it is only when solitude is embraced, that the false self is confronted as an imposter. The confrontation will take more than a relaxing holiday at a cabin or a day away from work, as Henri Nouwen states:

We think of solitude as a station where we can recharge our batteries, or as the corner of the boxing ring where our wounds are oiled, our muscles massaged, and our courage restored by fitting slogans. In short, we think of solitude as a place where we gather new strength to continue the ongoing competition in life.⁸

⁶ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 128.

⁷ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 25.

⁸ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 26-27.

Rather than harnessing new energy to do battle against our false perceptions of ourselves, solitude offers the underrated weapon that Nouwen refers to as ‘our nothingness’:

Anyone who wants to fight his demons with his own weapons is a fool. The wisdom of the desert is that the confrontation with our own frightening nothingness forces us to surrender ourselves totally and unconditionally to the Lord Jesus Christ.⁹

When all that we value is stripped away, we are left vulnerable, naked and alone. It is in that place where God’s love, grace and acceptance become the only offering that a leader has. Once a leader becomes acquainted with the experience of having nothing to offer, coupled with the strength and confidence of knowing God’s presence and acceptance, she can know that she is entering into the discipline of solitude.

Hearing God’s voice in Silence

The discipline of silence goes hand in hand with the discipline of solitude.

According to Nouwen, “The Desert Fathers praise silence as the safest way to God.”¹⁰

Our contemporary, western culture is noisy; technological advancements have made finding silence virtually impossible. “The convenience of sound,” writes Donald Whitney “has contributed to the spiritual shallowness of contemporary western Christianity.”¹¹

Words are noises that clamour for our attention. The convenience of words is one of the greatest pitfalls of pastors. Many pastors burn out because they devote too much time to speaking and not enough time to the discipline of silence. In a culture of many

⁹ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 28.

¹⁰ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 43.

¹¹ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 187.

words, the postmodern leader would be wise to practise what the fifth-century desert father, Diadochus of Photiki calls “closing the door of the steambath”:

When the door of the steambath is continually left open, the heat inside rapidly escapes through it; likewise the soul, in its desire to say many things, dissipates its remembrance of God through the door of speech, even though everything it says may be good. Thereafter the intellect, though lacking appropriate ideas, pours out a welter of confused thoughts to anyone it meets, as it no longer has the Holy Spirit to keep its understanding free from fantasy. Ideas of value always shun verbosity, being foreign to confusion and fantasy. Timely silence, then, is precious, for it is nothing less than the mother of the wisest thoughts.¹²

In a society where words burst forth from spiritual leaders like water from a rock, there is a desperate need for the silent wisdom that comes from personal communion with God. Modernist leaders were often so intent on producing evangelistic results that it seemed normal for church leader’s “steambath doors” to be wide open. The role of the postmodern leader is not to be a great orator but to be a person who is willing to keep the steambath door closed, even when it means being misunderstood and being judged as weak and unable to lead effectively. Wise leaders will be those who understand the value of timely silence as well as timely words.

Leaders discern God’s voice in silence. Wise leaders know silence is more valuable than words. This is important in their personal relationship with God as well as their relationships with others.

Silence and Relationships

Westerners have tended to rely on words to give us power and control over other people. By entering into the discipline of silence, we release our ability to manage and

¹² Diadochus of Photiki, “On Spiritual Knowledge and Discrimination: One Hundred Texts,” in *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth, trans., eds., G.E.H Palmer, Phillip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware (London & Boston: Faber & Faber, 1979), 276. Quoted in Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 52-53.

control the people and situations around us. Richard Foster offers the discipline of silence as a way of confronting our own internal tendency to exert power over another:

One reason we can hardly bear to remain silent is that it makes us feel so helpless. We are so accustomed to relying upon words to manage and control others. If we are silent, who will take control?

The tongue is our most powerful weapon of manipulation. A frantic stream of words flows from us because we are in a constant process of adjusting our public image. We fear so deeply what we think other people see in us that we talk in order to straighten out their understanding.¹³

When someone judges us or challenges us our natural instinct is to correct their thinking. But is our natural instinct to justify ourselves the most fruitful response? Our self-defense is an attempt to control and change the other person. But the discipline of silence allows God to be our justifier; it allows God to “take control” of situations that we desperately want to manage and change.

Silence calls us to forsake our need to be right and to prove others wrong. Often the need to lash back at people who wrongly accuse us is to protect our reputation; but as Richard Foster confidently states, “Perhaps more than anything else, silence brings us to believe that God can care for us—‘reputation and all.’”¹⁴

Letting others have their Way: the Discipline of Submission¹⁵

Submission was not a high priority for modernist, Western church leaders: “the stronger the better,” tended to be their axiom. Yet postmoderns are skeptical of the strong, autocratic, dictatorial leaders that sought to thrive in modernist contexts.

Postmoderns are looking for leaders who model self-denial. Richard Foster writes about

¹³ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 126.

¹⁴ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 126.

¹⁵ Portions of this section were previously submitted in an assignment for the Ethics course, Money, Sex and Power at McMaster Divinity College, winter 2005. The title of the paper was *The Power of Submission: A Reaction to Authoritarian Leadership in the Local Church*.

self-denial through submission in particular: “Self-denial is simply a way of coming to understand that we do not have to have our own way...[it] declares that we are of infinite worth and shows us how to realize it.”¹⁶ Self-denial demands high self-esteem. In order to deny self there must be recognition that a valuable self is present. The more value someone believes they have, the more willing they will be to submit through self-denial. In order to offer oneself in submission and self-denial, the leader’s self confidence must first be formed through times of silence and solitude which provide the occasion for finding their true worth in Christ’s loving estimation of them.

Jesus greatest example of submission was the cross. “Jesus lived the cross-life in submission to all human beings. He was the servant of all...Jesus’ life was the cross-life of submission and service. Jesus’ death was the cross-death of conquest by suffering.”¹⁷ Jesus was submissive to the corrupt religious leaders, the political figures and the crowds. He could have displayed his heavenly, miraculous power but he chose to submit to his creation—those who eventually killed him. The cross was his ultimate example of submission. “We do not start at the cross and go on to bigger and better things. We start there and go deeper and deeper, but there we also find the power, the living power, of that same Jesus.”¹⁸

Jesus’ cross-life was lived as an example for his followers to emulate. The apostle Paul describes what it means to submit to and serve others when he writes, “...In humility consider others better than yourselves...look not only to your own interests but

¹⁶ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 142-43.

¹⁷ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 145.

¹⁸ Ford, *Transforming Leadership*, 157.

also to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3-4). As Richard Foster notes, this was a radical concept for first-century culture:

In first-century writings there was a constant appeal to submission because that was the way the gods had created things; it was one’s station in life. Not a single New Testament writer appeals to submission on that basis. They completely ignored all the contemporary customs of superordinate and subordinate and called everyone to ‘count others better than yourselves’ (Phil. 2:3)¹⁹

In Ephesians, Paul calls all people to, “submit to one another out of reverence to Christ” (Eph. 5:21). James characterizes submission as being wise: he contrasts it to harboring bitter envy and selfish ambition in one’s heart (James 3:14-17). Finally, Peter uses Christ’s suffering and death as the believer’s example to follow when he writes, “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example...When they hurled insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made not threats. Instead he entrusted himself to him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:21-23).

Biblical submission leads ultimately to human equality. It abandons status, position and the need to be right. It fulfils Jesus’ definition of discipleship: “For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a person to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?” (Mark 8:34-35). A leader who wants to relate to postmoderns will be a leader who takes the call to submission seriously, because they are rooted, above all, in the worth and identity bestowed on them by Christ.

Postmoderns are looking for leaders who are willing to admit their weaknesses and empower others as equals. Walter Wright defines empowering leadership as, “one person using his or her position in the marketplace to serve and nurture another; one

¹⁹ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 147.

person seeing in another the potential to be more than is visible today and committing him- or herself to the development of that potential.”²⁰ It is hard to be skeptical of a leader who naturally gives their power away. Empowering others requires self-confidence, since the empowered person may develop greater gifts and abilities than the leader. Leighton Ford writes, “The strongest leaders are those who have received a strong affirmation of their personhood, in a way which frees them not only to lead a cause but also to serve others. A sense of identity, a security that comes from knowing who one is, lies at the very heart of leadership.”²¹ By gaining a sense of identity through one’s encounter with Christ in silence and solitude, the leader can then live in submission to their community without losing themselves in the process.

At what point does submission become unhealthy? Richard Foster notes that, “submission reaches the end of its tether when it becomes destructive.”²² There is no easy way to determine when submission becomes destructive; that is one of the roles of the Holy Spirit. Richard Foster believes the limits of submission can only be discerned by the work of the Spirit: “the Spirit is an accurate discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, both yours and mine. He will be to us a present Teacher and Prophet, instructing us in what to do in every situation.”²³ When a situation becomes unhealthy and the one who is submitting becomes stifled rather than freed, then help must be sought. That is when the larger community of believers becomes a crucial asset in

²⁰ Walter C. Wright, *Relational Leadership: A Biblical Model for Leadership Service* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), 43-44.

²¹ Ford, *Transforming Leadership*, 37.

²² Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 150.

²³ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 151.

bringing reconciliation and healing to person who becomes trapped in a destructive cycle of submission.

Notwithstanding this potential danger, postmodern leaders will be called to empower through submission to their community. They will be called to allow others to have their way at times when they would rather have their own. In so doing, leaders will discover freedom to love and serve their community, “just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph. 5:25).

The Way of Corporate Vulnerability: The Discipline of Confession

One obvious sign of a leader’s corporate vulnerability is her willingness to engage in the discipline of confession. James 5:16 says, “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” I have seldom heard church leaders confess their sins. Is that because they are more holy than others or because they are exempt from this call to open vulnerability?

In the modernist church context, a leader’s confession often meant that their position and title were in jeopardy. A struggling leader did best to keep their sins hidden and lead a double life, rather than take a risk and become corporately vulnerable. The problem was that people tended to discover the struggles that the leader was facing. Then, seeing their duplicity, they lost respect because their words did not match their lifestyle.

Postmodern church leaders need to carry their pain and struggles into their encounters with their communities or, perhaps, to a trusted circle of community members that represents the larger whole. Henri Nouwen says it like this:

I am convinced that priests and ministers, especially those who relate to many anguishing people, need a truly safe place for themselves. They need a place

where they can share their deep pain and struggles with people who do not need them, but who can guide them ever deeper into the mystery of God's love.²⁴

If postmodern leaders want to grow and learn, they must be willing to practise confession and receive forgiveness in and from the communities they serve.

Confession and God

The discipline of confession does two things well: it breaks down walls between people and it destroys barriers between the leader and God. Central to this discipline is Christ's work on the cross:

Without the cross the Discipline of confession would be only psychologically therapeutic. But it is so much more. It involves an objective change in our relationship with God and a subjective change in us. It is a means of healing and transforming the inner spirit.²⁵

If a leader is to become vulnerable with God, he must open himself up to others as a pathway of healing. Human communities make our relationship with God more tangible. When we confess our sins and struggles to others it impacts our intimacy with God. Richard Foster notes that, "It is through the voice of our brothers and sisters that the word of forgiveness is heard and takes root in our lives."²⁶ By practising corporate confession, a leader can experience God's forgiveness, offered through a human community. Struggles were once personal, intimate, private details that were confessed and wrestled with exclusively between the leader and God; through corporate confession they become opportunities for the demonstration of God's love, forgiveness and support through the leader's church community.

²⁴ Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 50.

²⁵ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 182.

²⁶ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 186.

The Impact of Confession on Relationships

Corporate confession is not all about God's work in the leader's life; it also impacts relationships between people in the community. When a leader is vulnerable enough to share their struggles and pain, intimacy is birthed and nurtured in that community. When a community believes they can relate to the struggles of their leader, a deeper connection, between members of the community and the leader, is formed. Deep connections are essential in moving through the conflicts that arise in communities like the church. Foster notes that people hurt one another and as a result, confession and forgiveness are essential in building relational bridges:

Human beings are such that 'life together' always involves them in hurting one another in some way. And forgiveness is essential in a community of hurt and hurtful persons.²⁷

Many Canadians have walked away from churches because they were involved in a painful conflict of some sort. The church is in desperate need of leaders who are willing to confess their sins, struggles and pain to congregations who are desperate for vulnerability and authenticity in the pulpit and in the pews. Eugene Peterson sees the pastor as, "one of the sinners in a community of sinners":

The biblical fact is that there are no successful churches. There are, instead, communities of sinners, gathered before God week after week in towns and villages all over the world. The Holy Spirit gathers them and does his work in them. In these communities of sinners, one of the sinners is called pastor and given a designated responsibility...to keep the community attentive to God.²⁸

When the church and pastor are seen as sinners, rather than perfected saints, confession can become a natural part of community life. When leaders see themselves as sinners who are called to keep their communities attentive to God, rather than saints who are

²⁷ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 196.

²⁸ Eugene H. Peterson. Quoted in Jay Kesler, *Being Holy Being Human: Dealing with the Incredible Expectations and Pressures of Ministry* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1988), 77.

God's gift to their congregations, the result will be fewer hurtful interactions with people and more reconciliation on every level. And attentiveness to God is rarely more direct and focused than in the discipline of confession.

The Limits of Corporate Confession

There are limits to the amount that a leader should confess to their community. Sometimes confession can inflict more damage than good on a community. Referring to the need for a ministry of confession and forgiveness among ministers, Henri Nouwen offers this caution:

This does not mean that ministers or priests must, explicitly, bring their own sins or failures into the pulpit or into their daily ministries. That would be unhealthy and imprudent and not at all a form of servant leadership. What it means is that ministers and priests are also called to be full members of their communities, are accountable to them and need their affection and support, and are called to minister with their whole being, including their wounded selves.²⁹

Contrary to what Nouwen is saying, I believe there are times when the postmodern leader should share about their struggles from the pulpit or in a ministry, but I agree with Nouwen that there are usually better places to confess. What is important is that the leader must participate fully in the community as a broken and wounded servant. By being in touch with their wounds, leaders can offer their pain to their community and trust Christ to use it to bring healing to others.

Having said that, the act of confession itself must never be trusted to bring healing; healing, forgiveness and restoration come through the ministry of Jesus. Confession can be abused to the point where it is believed that the act itself becomes restorative; but this is not Christian confession; confession that is centered on Christ

²⁹ Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 50.

allows God to bring inner healing in the life of the leader and outer reconciliation in the life of the community.

Summary

Postmodern leaders lead differently than modernist leaders. Whereas modernist leaders sought to rely on their strength and positional power, postmodern leaders must embrace their weaknesses and become vulnerable in order to effectively minister in the emerging Canadian culture.

One of the most effective ways to release the natural tendency to be powerful is by nurturing spiritual disciplines. In this chapter I have focused on three disciplines in particular: the discipline of silence and solitude, the discipline of submission and the discipline of confession. I believe these three disciplines offer the leader paths toward personal vulnerability and authenticity in relating to God and people.

Silence and solitude are important for the leader in learning the art of listening to God. In a culture where noise and clamor are omnipresent, the leader must retreat to places where he can be alone to listen to the voice of God. Silence is essential, not only in hearing and discerning God's voice but also in listening to other people. It allows the leader to hear the opinions of others, right or wrong, without having to vocalize their own opinion.

The discipline of submission is an unpopular leadership practice. Yet because Canadians are skeptical of leaders who wield power and control over others, the discipline of submission offers a counter-cultural solution. The postmodern leader can embrace a position of weakness and vulnerability as she leads out of submission to his community. By submitting and serving her community, the postmodern leader casts

aside the need to have her own way in favour of serving and loving those who do. The leader rejects the position of authority in order to live a life of service and empowerment. By empowering others the leader also recognizes that those who are empowered may possess greater gifts, insight and abilities than the leader does; yet that does not concern the submissive leader, who looks to the interests of others along with their own (Phil. 2:3-4). I offered one caution with this discipline: submission can become destructive. Knowing when it becomes destructive requires the Holy Spirit's guidance. The broader congregational community can also be helpful in ensuring that freedom rather than slavery results from practising this discipline.

The discipline of corporate confession is a way for postmodern leaders to become ultimately vulnerable before their communities. It provides an opportunity for the leader to receive the forgiveness and support needed from their community. Many modernist leaders have been skeptical about congregational acceptance of their shortcomings; as a result they tended to suppress their pain and struggles. Postmoderns believe that if their communities condemn rather than embrace them for their shortcomings and struggles, then they are better off finding a new community. Corporate confession allows the community to see the leader as a real person who has genuine struggles. It also allows God's forgiveness to become tangible and rooted like personal, private confession often does not. It is a powerful vehicle for creating intimacy with God and one's community.

CONCLUSION

JOINING THE CANADIAN POSTMODERN SPIRITUAL DANCE

The Canadian church can learn the postmodern spiritual dance and transform lives and communities in the process. By entering the dance the church cannot forsake its Christ-centered mission; rather the dance is a new form by which to communicate its ancient “Good News” message. Many Canadians have joined the dance, yet the life-changing message of Jesus is, in many cases, still locked in modernist church boxes that keep it from being easily accessible to postmoderns. The goal of this thesis has been to argue that a new framework for leadership and communication are needed if the Western church is to communicate effectively with Canadians.

I believe the vast majority of local churches in Canada are trapped in a modernist mindset. They have become dependent on Enlightenment principles to interpret the Christian message and communicate it to Canadians. While Enlightenment principles may have been effective for the last few hundred years, society has become increasingly postmodern and many of the principles that governed Modernism no longer govern the lives of people in the twenty-first century.

The Modernist Church

Modernism was founded upon and is governed by the principles of reason, natural law, autonomy, harmony and human progress. Not only have these principles governed Canadian society for hundreds of years, they have also governed the direction and structures of the Western church during that time.

A reliance on reason augmented the intellect and downplayed experience. It created a dependence on rationalism: the use of the mind to discover spiritual truth predominated over direct experience of God. The supremacy of rationalism in the church led to an over-emphasis on programmes and structures as a means to discipleship, at the expense of the relational focus that also characterized the early church.

The Modernist principle of natural law led people to believe that the world and everything in it was seen as a machine: everything had an order to it and therefore it could all be somehow organized into a modernist law. Appeal to mystery and the supernatural tended to be downplayed as primitive ways of interpreting things that were not yet understood. Modernists believed that every mystery would one day be understood and classified as operating in accord with natural law. As a result of this emphasis, spirituality fell under the scrutiny of modernist reason and was perceived as a pursuit for the less enlightened. Many churches, including the United Church of Canada, have abandoned a transcendent spirituality in favor of meeting social needs and bringing order to those whose lives were chaotic and in need of tangible help—rather than engaging both transcendent and practical emphases.

Autonomy, for the modernist, gave the individual greater value than their community. This shift had major ramifications for the church. Whereas before the Enlightenment the church was central to the broader community, modernism challenged the authority of the church and freed people to decide whether they wanted to practise the Christian faith. Autonomous freedom, during the modern era, even went as far as emphasizing individual choice—to accept Jesus Christ as one's personal Saviour—to the exclusion of any other factor.

A certain kind of conceptual and behavioural harmony was the goal of the modernist church. Differences between people were seen as negative, extending as far as ethnic and racial backgrounds. Churches selected leaders and implemented programmes in order to nurture one harmonious discipleship ideal. The principle of harmony meant that all Christians would eventually manifest their belief in a similar way and have the same devotional practices in common.

The Western church's emphasis on human progress nurtured an unhealthy focus on fostering perfect communities. Rather than seeing themselves as a gathering of sinners who lived in submission to a gracious God; many modernist Christians developed the attitude that they were more righteous and holy than those who had not yet accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour. This fostered a spirit of elitism, among other things, and it segregated the church from the rest of Canadian society.

The Postmodern Church

As Modernism slowly dies, postmodernism is emerging; with it has come a significantly new set of values and principles.

Postmoderns do not believe that reason alone is supreme; they also rely on experience to inform their worldviews. For the church, this means that orthodoxy must express itself in and be tested by orthopraxy. If the church's message and actions do not line up, postmoderns will ignore the church's message.

Postmoderns do not believe that the universe is a neatly designed package that can be fully known; they believe the universe to be mysterious and supernatural. They know that humanity will never be able to know everything there is to know and they are

comfortable with that belief. This has also created a heightened interest in spirituality, often outside the normal parameters of religion.

The emphasis on human autonomy that is typical of Modernism has cultivated a hunger for community in many postmoderns. While postmoderns like the opportunity to choose for themselves, many are using their freedom to choose to be a part of diverse and inclusive communities. Whereas Modernism emphasized individual, private practices in spiritual formation, postmoderns are turning to community as a crucial part of their own personal formation.

Postmoderns are skeptical of the modernist vision of “carbon-copy” Christianity. They see the need for congregational diversity as a means of promoting mature discipleship. Rather than dividing people of different ages, ethnic backgrounds and spiritual levels into various discipleship groups, postmoderns understand the value of diverse intermingling: they believe that everyone has something to learn from each other regardless of how different they are.

Finally, postmoderns are naturally skeptical of Christian communities that seek progression toward perfectionism. Rather than appealing to righteousness and holiness as prerequisites for knowing Christ, postmoderns are attracted to vulnerability and weakness as pathways to God. Many postmoderns know from experience that striving toward perfectionism in the church often leads to inflated egos and a disconnection between church and culture. Rather than abandoning a call to live in righteousness, the postmodern church will be wise to emphasize vulnerability and weakness as a conduit to righteousness.

Living In Between the Modern and the Postmodern

In light of the dramatic cultural shift that is taking place in Canada and impacting the Church, I have suggested that leadership in postmodern congregations will be significantly different than it was for those with modernist values. While Canada is more postmodern than ever, it is still clinging onto many of its modernist roots. For this reason, the postmodern leader will have to lead the church cautiously and gently from the boardroom onto the streets where the postmodern dance is taking place. In this thesis, I have proposed that this shift is a liminal experience. In this liminal experience the church is caught between its dying, modernist identity and what it will become in postmodernity. During this phase, church leaders must understand and be able to relate to the modernist and postmodernist mindsets alike. This will be a demanding and daunting task but one that can be overcome by doing things like focusing on serving the marginalized, sharing intergenerational meals, and calling the church to find itself in the story of Scripture as a means to discovering its emerging identity.

The church leaders who boldly yet gently call the church to re-examine itself in light of its de-centered, liminal experience, will be the ones who rely on a different set of leadership characteristics. These characteristics were outlined in chapters four through eight.

Learners in Eclectic Communities

Postmodern church leaders will possess characteristics that are different from those of modernist leaders. I believe postmodern church leaders must be experiential, spiritual, collaborative, missional, and vulnerable if they are to communicate the Good News of Jesus Christ effectively to postmodern Canadians. These characteristics are not

nebulous traits; they are drawn out of the principles of postmodernism. The characteristics, however, as yet are largely underdeveloped in a church that is still relying heavily on a business leadership model.

Experiential Leadership

Effective twenty-first century leaders will rely on their experience as much as their intellect when serving their congregations. Rationalism, with all of its well-reasoned arguments, is no longer effective as the primary means of communicating with Canadians. Canadians are looking for leaders who embody what they believe. In order to lead postmoderns, the leader will have to demonstrate what they want to communicate, experientially. Rather than using a typical didactic style of preaching and teaching, postmodern leaders are wise to communicate by story, calling the contemporary church to find itself in the ancient story of Scripture. Postmoderns are intrigued by a good story but they are also intrigued by leaders who use participation and appeal to the senses when they communicate. Postmodern leaders will be most effective when they are immersed in their community as learners, using day to day conversations and interactions as moments to teach and learn simultaneously.

Spiritual Leadership

Church leadership is not synonymous with spiritual leadership. Many modernist leaders have been wooed by mega church visions; they have adopted the same mindset and lifestyle as that of business executives and CEO's. Most postmoderns are not attracted to business savvy pastors and leaders; they gravitate to people who are more like themselves—spiritually hungry and spiritually intense. While the modernist church struggled to integrate the latest church growth techniques into their ministries, Canadians

were becoming more open to spiritual things. Leaders who can relate to a wide range of people, with different perspectives on spirituality, will be most effective in communicating with postmodern Canadians. That does not mean that the leader must become a doctrinal pluralist, it means that the leader must be open to affirming that other forms of spirituality are valid experiences, even if they are not Christ-centered or experiences that are shared by the leader. By validating the experience of another, the postmodern leader has a greater opportunity to learn but also to share his or her experience with Christ.

Spiritual leadership involves breaking down the traditional dichotomy between sacred and secular. It means treating every experience and conversation as spiritual. Postmodern spiritual leadership creates room to listen to God and people outside the traditional, modernist venues like Sunday morning church services, personal Bible study, and prayer.

Collaborative Leadership

One of the shifts in postmodern leadership is in regard to structure. Modernist leaders often lead autonomously. They are given positions of prominence and power and use hierarchical networks to minister to their congregations. Postmoderns, on the other hand, are naturally collaborative. They are skeptical of hierarchies in the church, favouring a team approach to ministry. Collaborative leadership means listening to the community. It means looking for opportunities for congregational empowerment. One of the challenges for a collaborative leader is conflict; since more people are involved in collaborative leadership, there are more opportunities for conflict to arise. Collaborative

leaders must not shy away for conflict but rather confront it graciously by looking for creative solutions, using it as a learning tool for the community and leader alike.

Missional Leadership

Nurturing diverse communities is what makes postmodern churches vastly different than those built on modernist principles. Leading diverse communities demands missional leadership that is centered on reconciliation. Missional leaders cultivate congregational reconciliation by promoting intercultural relationships, allowing their own cultural biases to be subject to others' perspectives. Missional leaders promote reconciliation between people from varying socio-economic backgrounds. Rather than starting churches to reach the suburban rich and others to reach the inner city poor, missional leaders bring both groups together as an expression of reconciliation.

Evangelism for missional leaders is seen as an expression and outworking of life in God's kingdom, rather than as a task that Christians must perform. Missional leaders believe that the lines between insiders and outsiders in the kingdom of God are left up to God's discretion rather than the church.

Vulnerable Leadership

Postmoderns understand the pain and complexities of living in the twenty-first century. Therefore, effective postmodern leaders cannot flaunt their knowledge and power as an appeal to postmoderns; they must recognize and lead from their weaknesses. Weakness is a postmodern spiritual leader's greatest asset since, what Jesus said to the apostle Paul also holds true for the postmodern leader: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9).

Vulnerable leadership is cultivated through practising the spiritual disciplines of silence and solitude, submission, and corporate confession. Silence and solitude allow the leader to discover their God-given identity. Intentionally removing oneself from the noise and pace of Canadian culture in order to embrace silence and solitude as pathways to communion with Christ is the first step in nurturing vulnerability in leadership.

Living in submission to the community is the leader's next step in cultivating a ministry of weakness. While all three of these disciplines run counter-culturally to what one might expect from a leader, this discipline is the hardest to grasp. By serving the community, the leader's vulnerability rather than their strength and power become the place from which ministry flows.

Corporate confession is the discipline that demands the most confidence in the power of weakness. By opening personal pain and hurt to a community, small or large, a leader is left defenseless and vulnerable. It exposes the most intimate areas of a leader's life so that God might work through the community to bring restoration and forgiveness. It is a powerful example of counter-cultural leadership.

Leading counter-culturally is at the heart of postmodern church leadership. Welcoming counter-cultural leaders is one step the modernist church in Canada can take. By embracing leaders who are experiential, spiritual, collaborative, missional and vulnerable, the Canadian church will have a better chance of learning the spiritual dance of postmodern spirituality. If the church does not move out of the modernist boardrooms—a space that is being increasingly abandoned by Canadian society—it will never make vital connections with postmoderns.

The Canadian church has a unique opportunity to learn the dance and be embraced by postmoderns. Entering the postmodern dance is the first step toward seeking God's kingdom in the twenty-first century. The dance has started; it is radically experiential, overtly spiritual, intimately collaborative, potentially missional, and learning the moves will require vulnerability. Only one question remains: who will adjourn the meeting in the modernist church boardroom and make a motion—to dance.

A Final Reflection on the Auction Conflict

As I reflect on the unfolding drama that took place as a result of a clash between the modernist Elders and my postmodern small group I realize that it was more complex than I had initially thought. In the complexity I now see that the root of the conflict was the way we communicated with each other and the lack of respect we had for each other. In hindsight I believe the conflict could have been avoided if our small group had fully informed the Elders of our plans at every step in the process—allowing them to give feedback and possibly even added resources to our plan to help the young family in need. The Elders, on the other hand, could have made an effort to attend the action and experience it firsthand in order to offer their own perspectives in addition to their rationalistic arguments against “temple auctions” in general.

Ultimately, had both groups been more vulnerable and sensitive to the others' worldview, the conflict could have been minimized significantly. Could the postmodern small group learn the ways of the modernist boardroom table? Probably not very effectively. Could the Elders at First Modernist Church learn the postmodern dance? Probably not very effectively. But there is a solution, a middle ground from which these two groups could learn from one another. Rather than meeting around the modernist

boardroom table, the Elders and the small group could meet at another table, the supper table. There they could share in communion with the Lord Jesus Christ and conversation with each other. And when the meal is over everyone will leave; some will make their way home while others will move to the street, to dance the postmodern dance.

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