

The Promise of the Emerging Church: A Critical Engagement

by

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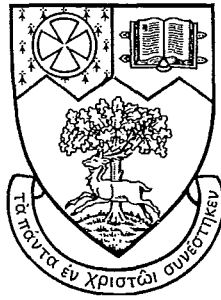
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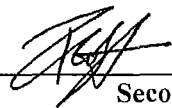
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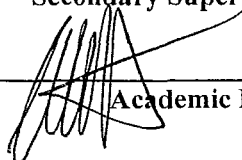
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ABSTRACT

The Promise of the Emerging Church: A Critical Engagement

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This thesis maintains that the development of the “emerging church,” in terms of both its theology and ecclesiology, is a needed and advantageous development within the current postmodern climate. Key introductory issues in relation to the emerging church are dealt with including its definition, its values, and its development. A theological evaluation is used to examine the emerging church’s ecclesiology. The theological criteria developed to test the emerging church are whether it is incarnational and missional. Both criteria are theologically grounded with corresponding principles drawn from the theological examination. The principles are then used as means to evaluate the emerging church’s theology and ecclesiology. The emerging church as an advantageous and positive development is substantiated through the missional and incarnational evaluation.

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THE PROMISE OF THE EMERGING CHURCH: A CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary postmodern culture is presenting a unique challenge and opportunity to the Western church. Secular modernity is declining, as spiritual postmodernity begins to assert itself as the reigning and diverse worldview of the West.¹ Within this postmodern space, theology, Christian spirituality, and their expression in a fresh ecclesiology, are given new life and breath.² The prevailing mood of modernity is now fading as a contemporary postmodern worldview coalesces with globalism into a multi-faceted, and dynamic perspective. As the world shifts in response to contemporary ideas, the global collision of values and lifestyles, and the advent of a new technosis-based society, churches are placed precariously within torrent of change. Into this postmodern space of change new expressions of the Christian faith are beginning to merge into a movement that share a common ethos, values, and trajectory. These new expressions of faith are aptly named the “emerging church.” This thesis seeks to examine and evaluate the emerging church’s response to the aforementioned societal shift through a theological approach. It maintains that the development of the emerging church, in terms of both its theology and ecclesiology, is a needed and advantageous development within the current postmodern climate.

This thesis evaluates the emerging church from a theological perspective, specifically focusing on the emerging church’s ecclesiology. The ecclesiology of the emerging church is the outworking of its theological praxis and is therefore suitable for

¹ Gianni Vattimo commenting on the demise of modernism and the rise of spirituality writes, “We believed that we could realize justice on earth, but now reckon that is no longer possible and turn our hopes to God.” Vattimo, *Belief*, 24.

² Davies, “Introduction: Holy Saturday or Resurrection Sunday?,” 1.

examination and evaluation. This approach is not only valuable but also needed as many of the current examinations of the emerging church focus not on ecclesiology and theology, but on postmodern philosophy, epistemology and theological specifics such as soteriology.³ In short a comprehensive evaluation of the theology and ecclesiology of the emerging church, taken as a whole, is needed and timely. God's incarnational and missional mandates are the evaluative criteria used to examine the emerging church.⁴ The evaluation focuses on the emerging church's specific theological and ecclesiological response to the current postmodern culture. This evaluation does not preclude the possibility of other theological and ecclesiological responses to the current postmodern society.⁵

The argument of this thesis proceeds in a three-fold-progression. First, the context of the emerging church is discussed. The context highlights the development of the emerging church, its key terms, and key values. Secondly, the evaluative criteria are introduced and explained. Thirdly, the evaluative criteria are applied to the emerging church with specific examples given. Through this three-fold process a positive evaluation of the emerging church in terms of its theology, especially its ecclesiology, are demonstrated.

³ For example within D. A. Carson's book *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* and the publication *Engaging Emergent* the main focus is on epistemological and soteriological arguments against the emerging church. *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*, while offering both arguments for and against the emerging church, focused primarily on epistemology and postmodern philosophy. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, 166–69, 181–87, and 218–34; Henard, and Greenway, ed., *Evangelicals Engaging Emergent*, 109–58 and 187–218; Penner, ed., *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*, 37–71 and 123–229.

⁴ For the purposes of this paper I will follow the biblical language by using male pronouns for God. This usage though in no way intends to project gender onto God with the terminology used.

⁵ For example, there is the "New Calvinism" response that is highlighted in the popular-level book by Colin Hansen, *Young, Restless, and Reformed*, 11–12.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE EMERGING CHURCH

The emerging church is a much discussed and debated movement within current Christian circles. Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch write that, “There is no doubt that we face a spiritual, theological, missional, and existential crisis in the West.”⁶ The emerging church is seeking to respond to this crisis in new and innovative ways. For some the emerging approach generates hope as a new approach to ministry and Christian life outside a modern framework; others see the emerging church as dangerous and misguided.⁷ To be able to demonstrate the positive nature of the emerging church it first must be clearly understood and defined. Consequently, this section provides a working definition of the emerging church, its history, key terms, and values.

Key Terms

Prior to evaluating and discussing the emerging church, certain key terms must be examined. First, the term “emerging church” itself must be defined so that it is clear who and what specifically are being evaluated. Second, the term “traditional evangelical church” must also be defined for clarity. Third, the terms “postmodernism,” “incarnational,” and “missional” must also be defined. These three terms are key descriptors of the emerging church and therefore must be appropriately situated prior to any further discussion, to ensure clarity and understanding.

The Emerging Church

⁶ Frost and Hirsch, *ReJesus*, 5.

⁷ For example see *Evangelicals Engaging Emergent*, 109–28, which clearly sees the emerging church as dangerous, and see Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 218–35, which presents the emerging church in a hopeful light.

Prior to engaging the history, new terminology, and values of the emerging church a working definition with preliminary boundaries as to what constitutes the emerging church must be given. Defining the emerging church is difficult because it is a fluid and changing movement. The difficulty is to create a definition of the emerging church that is simultaneously both broad and generous, in order to include the diversity found within the emerging church, yet specific enough to capture its distinctives. For example Mark Driscoll speaks of the “emerging church” as, “a broad category that encompasses a wide variety of churches and Christians who are seeking to be effective missionaries wherever they live. This includes Europeans and Australians who are having the same conversation as their American counterparts.”⁸ This definition has merit in recognizing that the emerging church is a global network, yet falls short because it is much too broad to be able to explain how the emerging church is a distinct network. A more specific definition is clearly needed to be able to evaluate appropriately the emerging church both in terms of its distinctive theology and ecclesiology.

The first step in establishing the working definition for the “emerging church” is to clarify the terminology. Names such as emergent, post-evangelical, alternative worship, new-monasticism, and missional, are all designations for new forms of “emerging churches.” The two major terms used within the movement itself are the “emerging church” and “emergent” churches. The term “emerging church” developed initially from Bruce Larson and Ralph Osborne. In their book they sought to reframe the newly evolving church of the twentieth century as the “emerging church.”⁹ The term “emergent” developed from the work of Catholic political theologian Johann Baptist

⁸ Driscoll’s definition would be better if he mentioned the postmodern context that the emerging church ministers to as missionaries. Driscoll, “A Pastoral Perspective on the Emerging Church,” 89.

⁹ Larson and Osborne, *The Emerging Church*, 9–11.

Metz in 1981.¹⁰ Both terms came to connote a fluid body of churches seeking to “do” church within a specific context. While there are specific nuances to each term, they are parallel enough to be used interchangeably to refer to churches that share certain characteristics. For the purposes of this thesis the term “emerging church” will be used to refer to the variety of churches that demonstrate the ethos, values, and characteristics that are described below, regardless of their own specific proper names.¹¹

The characteristics and values of the movement are the definitive boundaries for inclusion in the “emerging church” rather than specific labels. Hugh Halter argues that the issue has nothing to do with labels but with “*what is emerging and if the new forms of Christianity and church are authentic to the original ideas of Christ and appropriate to the culture that has lost interest in organized Christendom.*”¹² Values rather than labels define the emerging church. While its values are more fully elaborated below, a few preliminary remarks can be made.

Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, in their seminal and important study on the emerging church, put forward nine key values of the emerging church:

Emerging churches (1) identify with the life of Jesus, (2) transform the secular realm, and (3) live highly communal lives. Because of these three activities they (4) welcome the stranger, (5) serve with generosity, (6) participate as producers, (7) create as created beings, (8) lead as a body, and (9) take part in spiritual activities.¹³

These values are what shape and centre the definition of the emerging church for this

¹⁰ While Johanne Metz did not coin the term, he did bring the term back into greater circulation. See Metz, *The Emergent Church* as well as Jones, “3 Things the Emerging Church Took From the Catholics,” no pages.

¹¹ For example the alternative worship movement in the U.K. while having a different name is congruent with the emerging church to be included within the broader term. Specific attention must be given though to the term “Emergent.” The capitalized word Emergent refers specifically to the movement most prominently led by Tony Jones, Brian McLaren, and Doug Pagitt within the United States.

¹² Halter and Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom*, 14 (emphasis original).

¹³ Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 45.

thesis.¹⁴ Bolger and Gibbs's values are found throughout a cross-section of emerging churches and are representative of their ethos.

What must be made clear is that the emerging church is a "post"-modern expression of church. "Post" specifically means in this context, having "passed-through," the modern area. The emerging church is not anti-modernity, nor in competition with modern or traditional forms of church, but instead is a development after, and out of modernity. The emerging church is birthed out of modernism and traditional structures.

Dan Kimball helpfully clarifies:

I also don't think that the 'emerging' way is the new great way, or that if you aren't 'emerging' you are submerging, sinking, and useless. . . . We all have different places in the mission God has given us in our specific church contexts. One is not better than another; they are all just different depending on the local context.¹⁵

The emerging church is not necessarily antagonistic towards the differing styles of church that surround it. Instead, the emerging church sees itself as a contextual expression of church within a postmodern world. As a movement it does not disdain the movements that have preceded it, but appreciates them as the soil that has given it birth.

The Traditional Evangelical Church

The traditional evangelical church is occasionally contrasted with the emerging church in this paper. Therefore it is necessary to define the "traditional evangelical church". Much like the emerging church a comprehensive definition of the traditional evangelical church is difficult due to the diversity and changing nature of contemporary evangelicalism. Evangelicalism is "certainly a variegated movement."¹⁶ Evangelicals can

¹⁴ These values are furthered elaborated below in the section specifically addressing the emerging churches values.

¹⁵ Kimball, "The Emerging Church and Missional Theology," 84.

¹⁶ Taylor, "An Introduction to Postconservative Evangelicalism and the Rest of this Book," 30.

be found in a variety of denominations and no one speaker represents the evangelical camp as a whole. Instead a number of individuals and groups hold influence within the traditional evangelical church.¹⁷ While it is clear that a comprehensive definition of a traditional evangelical church is difficult, a working definition can be offered. Chad Brand puts forward this minimalist definition of the traditional evangelical church that appropriately summarizes the term for this paper. He writes:

Evangelicalism [refers to] . . . a movement within generally North American and British circles that emphasizes the classic Protestant doctrines of the authority and reliability of Scripture, the Triune God, and the historical second coming of Christ, and which promotes the need for fervent evangelism, a conversion experience, and a life of discipleship.¹⁸

To properly situate this definition a few characteristics of evangelicalism will be further elaborated.

First, evangelicals are in general from an orthodox protestant background. Kevin Vanhoozer writes that evangelicals “agree with the orthodox consensus of the church that God exists, reveals himself in word and deed, and is able to accomplish his gracious purpose.”¹⁹ Second, evangelicals stand in the “tradition of the global Christian networks arising from the eighteenth-century revival movements associated with John Wesley and George Whitefield.”²⁰ While certainly some within the evangelical camp will stress a different historical ancestry, a large portion of evangelicals have the eighteenth-century revival movements as part of their history. Due to evangelicalism’s historical roots it is generally found within North American and British circles. Third, evangelicals stress the

¹⁷ For example some key influencers within the evangelical camp would be Bill Hybels, Rick Warren, James A Dobson, Billy Graham, Focus On the Family, National Association of Evangelicals, Carl Henry, Millard J. Erickson, and others.

¹⁸ Brand, “Defining Evangelicalism,” 283.

¹⁹ Vanhoozer, “The Triune God of the Gospel”, 17.

²⁰ Larsen, “Defining and Locating ‘Evangelicalism’,” 5.

authority and divine inspiration of the Bible.²¹ In this sense evangelicals are “a people of the gospel.”²² Fourth, evangelicals stress reconciliation with God through the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross. This characteristic is often coupled with a strong belief in the necessity to be born again, a passion for evangelism, and the need for discipleship.²³ Fifth, traditionally evangelicals are not hesitant to self-identify as evangelicals. Sixth, “evangelicalism shares close ties with modernity.”²⁴ Stanley Grenz elaborates that the evangelical perspective is “a child of the Reformation, pietism, and revivalism, the evangelical movement was born in the early modern period.”²⁵ Therefore it is appropriate to note the ties that evangelicalism has had to modernity. What is important to grasp is that these characteristics are generalizations that demonstrate the ethos of evangelicalism and that there may be specific churches that may differ slightly. Therefore for the purposes of this paper the term evangelical church, traditional church, or modern church refers to the type of church that would exhibit the above mentioned characteristics, fit with Brand’s definition, and self-identify as evangelical.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism as a term must be properly situated as it is often used within emerging church literature.²⁶ To begin with, Myron Penner offers a caution in relation to the term “postmodern.” He writes:

The range of Christian responses is often presented as a dichotomy: either one is for it or one is against it. The actual fact of the matter is more complex than that.

²¹ The work of evangelical theologian Carl Henry has been particularly influential in this regard. For an overview of his influence see Grenz and Olson, *20th Century Theology*, 288–296.

²² Vanhoozer, “The Triune God of the Gospel,” 17.

²³ Brand, “Defining Evangelicalism,” 304.

²⁴ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 161.

²⁵ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 161.

²⁶ For a scholarly look at the defining the term postmodernism see Vanhoozer, “Theology and the Condition of Postmodernity,” 3–26, and Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 39–56.

Not only is the Christian community beginning to realize that the postmodern turn is varied and complex, but it is also learning that responses to it may be varied.²⁷

Penner's caution is wise in this instance because the emerging church's use of the term "postmodern" is both varied and broad. Some use the term to refer to the technical philosophy that stems from the work of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Emmanuel Levinas.²⁸ Others use the term "postmodern" to refer to the current cultural situation that is distinct from Enlightenment modernity.²⁹ The very diverse nature with the use of the term itself has led to much confusion because it does relate to both a cultural and philosophic movement.³⁰ Kevin J. Vanhoozer argues that the best way to speak of postmodernism is as a "condition" which has both cultural and philosophical elements.³¹ Seeing postmodernism as a condition allows for it to be both understood as an "intellectual/theoretical and cultural/practical . . . condition that affects modes of thought as well as modes of embodiment."³² The term "postmodernism" for the purposes of this paper, following Vanhoozer, *primarily* designates a certain cultural and intellectual condition that may be causally or simply coincidentally tied to philosophic postmodernism.³³ The postmodern condition however lacks a relative homogeneity that was present within modernity, thereby making it difficult to concisely summarize the

²⁷ Penner, "Introduction," 13.

²⁸ For example see Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism*, 18–26.

²⁹ This is the use that often occurs in the more "general" writings of the emerging church, including writers such as Hugh Halter, Brian McLaren, and Dan Kimball. While some of them have indeed read and interacted with some of the postmodern philosophers their specific usage is more cultural than philosophical. For an example see McLaren, *Everything Must Change*, 34–35.

³⁰ Jim Belcher's personal story about misunderstanding the two viewpoints of philosophic and cultural postmodernism is helpful in understanding postmodernism. See Belcher, *Deep Church*, 73–76.

³¹ Vanhoozer, "Theology and the Condition of Postmodernity," 4.

³² Vanhoozer, "Theology and the Condition of Postmodernity," 4.

³³ While the term postmodern does relate to both culture and philosophy the causal relationship between both postmodern culture and philosophy is vague at best. The possibility that French philosophy that is often obscurantist, labyrinthine, prone to misinterpretation, and highly technical, has led to the current culture is difficult to prove.

values of the current postmodern culture.³⁴ While recognizing the diversity within postmodernism there are some characteristics that are prevalent.³⁵ The postmodern condition, described in this paper, is one that is suspicious of power, post-individualistic, post-rationalistic, post-dualistic, and post-noeticentric.³⁶ More specifically some clear comments can be made about what postmodernism means from an emerging church perspective.³⁷

First, an emerging church perspective sees postmodernity as a radical break with modernity and Enlightenment foundationalism.³⁸ Second, postmodernity is the current cultural context in which the West finds itself.³⁹ Third, the postmodern context is expected to transition to becoming the dominant worldview in the West.⁴⁰ These three premises help to situate the term “postmodern” but do not precisely define the term. Robert Webber helps to describe the values inherent within a postmodern worldview from an emerging perspective. He writes:

Western history is now in a time of transition from the modern to an uncertain postmodern period. Indications of a postmodern worldview suggest that mystery, with its emphasis on complexity and ambiguity, community, with its emphasis on the interrelation of all things, and symbolic forms of communication, with an emphasis on the visual, are all central to the new way of thinking.⁴¹

³⁴ Keesmaat and Walsh, *Colossians Remixed*, 22–25.

³⁵ Kevin Vanhoozer writes the following on the difficulty of appropriately defining postmodernism: “Those who attempt to define or to analyze the concept of postmodernity do so at their own peril. In the first place, postmoderns reject the notion that any description or definition is ‘neutral’ . . . Second, postmoderns resist closed tightly bounded ‘totalizing’ accounts of such things as the ‘essence’ of the postmodern.” Thirdly, Vanhoozer mentions, that postmodernism is inherently diverse. Vanhoozer, “Theology and the Condition of Postmodernity,” 3.

³⁶ The values are found in Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 133 and 167–74.

³⁷ For a good overview on other key values including their respective modern counterparts see Jones, *Postmodern Youth Ministry*, 31–37; Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 44 and 61.

³⁸ Jim Belcher makes the case that whether one is for or against postmodernity rests on whether one believes postmodernity is a continuation of modernity, (“hyper-modernity”), or a break with modernity, (“post-modernity”). Belcher, *Deep Church*, 75 and 80–81.

³⁹ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 31.

⁴⁰ Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 58–63.

⁴¹ Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith*, 35.

The postmodern worldview is increasingly fluid, global, pluralistic, experiential, mystical, and narrative-based. In short, for the emerging church “postmodern” refers to the current cultural ethos, (while not excluding the reality of lingering modernity), that values plurality, experience, spirituality, holism, and community.

1. Postmodern Epistemology

Epistemology is a key related issue to postmodernity that deserves some specific attention. Often critiques of the emerging church focus specifically on how postmodernism epistemology is contrary to biblical belief. For example the popular critique of the emerging church by D. A. Carson focuses specifically on this issue.⁴² He argues that the emerging church cannot be founded on postmodern epistemology as it is specifically against absolute truth claims. Carson’s typified argument against postmodernism and therefore against the emerging church is seen in a variety of works.⁴³ Due to the frequency of this argument arising a brief explanation of it, its flaws, and a solution to the issue will be discussed.

First, the argument against the emerging church vis-à-vis postmodern epistemology follows the subsequent logic. Postmodern epistemology is said to reject truth and the ability to know truth. Carson writes that the “strongest postmoderns argue that all distinctions between right and wrong have no absolute status.”⁴⁴ Truth then becomes relativistic within postmodernism. Since the Christian faith has at its core a truth-claim one cannot then be postmodern and Christian. In essence the argument is that Christianity and postmodernism are mutually exclusive, or at the very least opposed.

⁴² Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, 104–115; 125–56.

⁴³ See Geivett, “Is God a Story,” 37–51; Smith, “Christian Postmodernism and the Linguistic Turn,” 53–67; Geisler and Howe, “A Postmodern View of Scripture,” 92–108; Smith, “‘Emergents,’ Evangelicals, and the Importance of Truth,” 129–156.

⁴⁴ Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, 112.

Carson writes, “The gospel is deeply and unavoidably tied to truths.”⁴⁵ Since postmodernism is against truth it is also then contrary to the Bible and incongruent with Christianity. This argument is variously seen in a variety of literature critiquing postmodernism and the emerging church.

Second, the main problem with the argument is that postmodernism does not reject truth in totality.⁴⁶ Postmodernism does not reject truth but rejects the ability to know truth absolutely. As Jacques Derrida writes that a reading “Cannot legitimately transgress the text toward something other than it, toward a referent or . . . toward a signified outside the text whose content could take place, or could have taken place outside of language.”⁴⁷ The point for Derrida, and postmodernists, is not that there is no truth or anything to be “read,” but that reading a text involves interpretation and therefore the possibility of fallibility. Therefore for Christians even reading the Bible involves interpretation but not the denial of truth. As James K. A. Smith writes, “the recognition of the gospel’s status as an interpretation does not negate its truth, nor does it concede to a sophomoric relativist claim that nothing is true. It simply concedes that its claims are not ‘clear’ or immediately evident to everyone.”⁴⁸ There is truth for a postmodern it is simply interpreted. This is the point that Carson and others fail to see, and why their critique falls short. Postmoderns are not arguing against the reality of truth, but the reality of unmediated truth. Their contention rests with interpretation not the existence of truth.

⁴⁵ Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, 216.

⁴⁶ For a full length treatment of this issue see Smith, “Whose Afraid of Postmodernism,” 215–26; and Westphal, *Overcoming Onto-Theology*, 75–105; 128–147.

⁴⁷ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 158.

⁴⁸ Smith, “Whose Afraid of Postmodernism,” 225.

Therefore for Carson to seek to advocate for the reality of truth misses the point.⁴⁹

Postmodernism is not against truth; therefore postmodernism as an epistemological stance is not incongruent with Christianity.

Third, the most cogent solution to creating a non-foundationalist postmodern epistemology is *Beyond Foundationalism* by Stanley Grenz and John Franke.

Postmodernism does not accept unmediated truths therefore excluding a foundational epistemology. Grenz and Franke sought to move beyond a foundational epistemology creating a non-foundationalist epistemology. In this work the two authors propose a biblical and philosophic understanding of epistemology that is truly postmodern. In their work Grenz, and Franke avoid foundationalism pointing a way forward that many within the emerging church use to base their epistemology upon. They begin in the first section by examining the current historical situation in which theology currently finds itself. Going beyond the fragmentation of both liberal and conservative theological schools, Grenz and Franke argue for localized theology.⁵⁰ Grenz and Franke seek to allow for theology to remain contextual yet distinctly Christian.

In the second section Grenz and Franke discuss the source for authority within theology. In this section they offer a distinctly non-foundationalist perspective. Rather than simply resorting to Scripture, in a self-legitimizing way, they present Scripture as the “norming norm.” Grenz and Franke write, “It is not the Bible as a book that is authoritative, but the Bible as the instrumentality of the Spirit; the biblical message

⁴⁹ Carson at one point simply lists Bible verses that speak about truth in his claim to demonstrate that there is truth. This action though misses the point as many postmoderns agree that there is truth, but not our ability to know it objectively. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, 188–217.

⁵⁰ Franke and Grenz, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 27.

spoken by the Spirit through the text is theology's norming norm."⁵¹ For Grenz and Franke the Scripture is not authoritative in a foundational, or unmediated way. Instead the Bible is authoritative as the norming norm, as the Spirit speaks through the Bible. Grenz and Franke also explain that the Spirit must in this sense be understood in community (i.e. plurality with interpretation) therefore moving away from foundationalism to a non-foundationalist approach.⁵² There is no one unmediated interpretation of Scripture but instead one Spirit who guides the community in an authoritative fashion. Scripture provides the source and cannon for the Spirit's working in the community but without sliding in foundationalism. Along with Scripture, Grenz and Franke also point to tradition as the "hermeneutical trajectory" of the church. In this way the localized theology of a specific community must fit with the trajectory of history. Tradition then provides the authoritative direction, while the Scripture interpreted through the Spirit provides the authoritative norming norm. Lastly they state that culture provides the "embedding context" for theology. Culture situates and affects theology. For Grenz and Franke by upholding Scripture, the trajectory of history, and the cultural community in which theology is born a non-foundationalist epistemology can be generated. Epistemology is not reduced to a single foundational factor but instead is understood within a matrix of belief.⁵³

In conclusion while the epistemology of postmoderns and those within the emerging church due differ significantly from Enlightenment epistemology it is not contrary to truth, the Bible, or God. Therefore evaluating the emerging church solely on epistemology, as much of Carson's work does, misses the point and remains

⁵¹ Franke and Grenz, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 69.

⁵² Franke and Grenz, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 91.

⁵³ Franke and Grenz, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 165.

inconclusive. The emerging church has demonstrated a cogent epistemology, and more importantly is an ecclesiological movement. Therefore a truly theological evaluation of the emerging church is needed for a conclusive argument for its either positive or negative contribution to be made.

*Incarnational*⁵⁴

The Incarnation is the fact that the Word, or Son of God, took on flesh and became fully human in Jesus. God, in taking on humanity became one of us. Scot McKnight summarizes, “In the Incarnation, God identifies with humans – all humans in all the dimensions of human life – to bring humans grace. He becomes what we are so we can become what he is.”⁵⁵ This becoming of “what he is” is described as “incarnational.”

“Incarnational” is the adjective that describes the type of activity that Jesus demonstrated in his coming to earth, in his ministry, and in his attitude. To be incarnational is to be like Christ in a holistic way, which includes actions, thoughts, and beliefs.⁵⁶ Christians are therefore called to be incarnational: to become like Christ in all ways. As well as describing a Jesus-centred outlook, the term can connote the necessity for engagement. The fact that the Word became Incarnate and entered into human experience has become a centrepiece for the theological necessity for engagement. God in the Incarnation identifies with us, demonstrating that we are called to be identified with

⁵⁴ For a more thorough definition of the term incarnational and its relationship to the Incarnation see the section below entitled “Developing the Term Incarnational.”

⁵⁵ McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, 56.

⁵⁶ Holistic as a term means taking a comprehensive viewpoint recognizing the importance of whole systems and the interdependence of parts. Rather than reducing an object, person, etc., holism seeks to understand the object in question in relation to the whole of what surrounds it. For more on the term holistic see footnote 410.

others. Incarnation is about “the flow of life from God to us” and therefore the flow of life from God to others *through us* in incarnational mission.⁵⁷

Missional

The term “missional” has arisen both to describe and to direct the emerging church. “Missional” is a term that specifically relates to the attitude, perspective, and character of a specific individual or church. The term is fairly recent, introduced into church vocabulary in 1998 with the publication of the book *Missional Church: A Vision for Sending of the Church in North America*.⁵⁸ Christopher J. Wright defines missional as follows: “Missional is simply an adjective denoting something that is related to or characterized by mission, or has the qualities, attributes, or dynamics of mission.”⁵⁹ In this sense missional, as it is related to mission, is primarily connected to “being sent.” The “sentness” of the term, does not relate to a Christendom understanding of being sent overseas. Instead the “sentness” of missional persons relates to their understanding that they are sent to people, whether close or far geographically, who do not know Jesus Christ. Jesus reminds us, “As the Father sent me, so I am sending you” (John 20:21). Jesus himself directs Christians to be sent ones partnering in the mission of God. This sent nature is at the heart of the term missional. Missional is the understanding that the lives of all Christians are to be lived in “sentness.”

Theologically the term “missional” finds its central impetus in the term *missio Dei* (mission of God). The connection between “sending” and the mission of God was made clear at the Willingen International Missionary Conference in Germany in 1952.

Commenting on this connection at Willingen, David Bosch writes:

⁵⁷ McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, 56.

⁵⁸ Barret, et al., *Missional Church*.

⁵⁹ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 24.

Mission was understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It was thus put in the context of the doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another “movement”: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world. As far as missionary thinking was concerned, this linking with the doctrine of the Trinity constituted an important innovation. Willigen’s image of mission was mission as participating in the sending of God.⁶⁰

The understanding of mission, as participating in the sending of God, is central to the term “missional.” As a term it connotes the active participation with God in God’s mission. Ed Setzer summarizing the term, and its roots, writes:

The theological concept of *missio Dei*, the mission of God, recognizes that God is a sending God and the church is sent. It is the most important mission in the Scriptures. Jesus Christ is the embodiment of that mission; the Holy Spirit is the power of that mission; the church is the instrument of that mission; and the culture is the context in which that mission occurs. . . . The source of missionary identity is located in the nature of the triune and sending God, and is connected ontologically with the very existence of the church.⁶¹

The God of mission must shape the nature of the church. Mission is simply the “outward impulse of God’s people. Above and beyond evangelism or social justice, it is the irresistible propulsion of the Spirit that sends his people out to declare the lordship of Jesus in all and over all.”⁶² At the core a missional outlook is a responsive relationship to the God of mission. Missional as a term and activity finds its centre in the nature of God, just as the church does.

Development of the Emerging Church

The development of the emerging church is a result of a number of diverse factors. This section describes the different factors that have shaped the emerging church,

⁶⁰ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390.

⁶¹ Setzer, “The Missional Nature of the Church and the Future of Southern Baptist Convention Churches,” 73.

⁶² Frost and Hirsch, *ReJesus*, 181.

thereby giving a context in which to situate the emerging church. The contextualized understanding of the emerging church is key to understanding and appreciating the values and ethos within it. Yet due to the diversity within the emerging church it is difficult to describe fully each factor that has contributed to its development. Therefore this section will first give a broad context to the emerging church followed by a more specific chronological and conceptual development.

There is not one story of “emergence” that generates a developmental history of the emerging church. Instead there are multiple stories of emergence that lead to a diverse grouping of people called the “emerging church” who have come to a similar place within the conversation. Peter Rollins writes:

What we are presented with is a diverse matrix of relationships that bridge a number of different communities. Even a cursory glance over this network will show that the participants are unified neither by a shared theological tradition, nor by an aspiration to one day develop one. The word ‘emerging’ cannot, then be understood as describing a type of becoming that is set to one day burst onto the religious scene as a single, unified, and distinct denominational perspective . . . or a becoming that can be carefully charted.⁶³

While a comprehensive developmental understanding of the emerging church is simply not fully possible, a glimpse into the development of the ethos of the emerging church is.

In general, the emerging church has developed in response to the cultural milieu in which it finds itself. The cultural milieu in the Western world is currently shifting and changing from a modern-based worldview to a postmodern worldview.⁶⁴ Along with the culture shift, churches “throughout the Western world find themselves increasingly

⁶³ Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 5.

⁶⁴ Culture is shifting and therefore is in a sense still emerging. David Bosch commenting on the postmodern culture writes, “The new paradigm is . . . still emerging and it is, as yet, not clear which shape it will eventually adopt. For the most part we are, at the moment, thinking and working in terms of *two* paradigms.” Bosch’s comment rightly points out that culture is a mixture of modernity and postmodernity. The key point for Bosch is that culture has momentum, moving from modernism towards postmodernism. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 349.

marginalized from society as they endeavor to relate the good news to people whose assumptions and attitudes have been shaped by modernity and postmodernity.”⁶⁵ This reality, often referred to as post-Christendom, presents a significant missiological challenge to the church.

The emerging church is seeking to respond to the new culture, marginalization of churches, and missiological challenge in a unique way. As culture is shifting so too is the theology and ecclesiology of the emerging church. Culture is moving from an individualistic, logic-based, and linear system to a relational, experiential, and multiphasic way of life. The emerging church “is an attempt to replot the Christian faith on this new cultural and intellectual terrain.”⁶⁶ Stanley Grenz argues that, “the postmodern situation requires that we embody the gospel in a manner that is post-individualistic, post-rationalistic, post-dualistic, and post-noeticentric.”⁶⁷ This is precisely what the emerging church seeks to do: to reexamine and reconstruct faith for the new postmodern paradigm.⁶⁸

The emerging church is seeking to re-envision the nature of life, theology, and ecclesiology as a result of the new postmodern trends. At its heart postmodernism “is a spiritual movement that resists the totalizing power of reason.”⁶⁹ The emerging church is moving away from a foundationalism based on Reason, towards a praxis based on Jesus Christ. This rediscovery occurring within current culture is of great consequence. The “postmodern world will demand a new church expression, just as did the rise of the

⁶⁵ Gibbs, *Church Next: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry*, 66.

⁶⁶ Perriman, *Otherways*, 10.

⁶⁷ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 167.

⁶⁸ For an examination of the word “postmodern” and its usage within the emerging church see McLaren, *Everything Must Change*, 34–38.

⁶⁹ Olthuis, “Face-To-Face: Ethical Asymmetry or the Symmetry of Mutuality?,” 35.

modern world.”⁷⁰ The emerging church is a new church expression for postmodernity. Frost and Hirsch comment, saying that what “will emerge from the chaos of the current social-historical shift to the postmodern is likely to be a second reformation as the church rediscovers itself as an apostolic movement.”⁷¹ While many may debate the scope and truth of such a grandiose statement, the truth is that the church is in the midst of rediscovery, and changing amidst postmodern plurality.

Phyllis Tickle is one author within the emerging church who agrees with Hirsch and Frost’s assessment. She goes even further to argue that the empowered structures of institutional Christianity shatter, so that new growth may develop approximately every five hundred years.⁷² She argues that the emerging church is the new expression of growth, for this five hundred year timeframe. While her theory surely is debatable, she gleans from Christian history some key turning points. Tickle makes these key observations concerning changes in Christianity.

First, a new more vital form of Christianity does indeed emerge. Second, the organized expression of Christianity, which up until then had been the dominant one, is reconstituted into a more pure and less ossified expression of its former self . . . The third result is of equal, if not greater significance though. That is, every time the incrustations of an overly established Christianity have been broken open, the faith has spread . . . dramatically into new geographic and demographic areas, thereby increasing exponentially the range and depth of Christianity’s reach as a result of its time of unease and distress.⁷³

Whether or not Tickle is correct in her theory of five-hundred year change, what is clear is that, during change, new forms of church emerge, reenergize the existing forms, and the gospel pushes into new areas. These shifts can be seen in the emerging church as it

⁷⁰ McNeal, *The Present Future*, 5.

⁷¹ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 15–16.

⁷² Tickle notes these five hundred year shifts, in chronological order: the life of Jesus, the time of Gregory the Great, the Great Schism, the Great Reformation, and the current Great Emergence. Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 16 and 19–31.

⁷³ Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 17.

emerges, reenergizes evangelicalism, and shares the gospel in a new postmodern world. Because of postmodernity, the emerging church is asking new and distinctly transformative questions about theology and ecclesiology.⁷⁴ The emerging church is set within a time of change, both in terms of church culture and societal culture. Within this culture of change the emerging church has developed both historically and conceptually.

The Historical Development of the Emerging Church: Gen-X Churches, NOS, and Cultural Change

Defining the actual date for the surfacing of the emerging church is difficult at best. What can be said is that the emerging church began to rise to a noticeable level of prominence ten to fifteen years ago. There were expressions of emerging church that would exhibit the values outlined below that were occurring prior to the ten to fifteen year window; the point though is that what was sporadic and relatively underground began to gain momentum and notoriety ten to fifteen years ago. The surfacing of the emerging church in Australia, New Zealand, and the U.K. happened with very little planning on behalf of denominations.⁷⁵ Instead, emerging churches sprang up as contextual church experiments from grassroot efforts. The emergent movement is not “exclusively North American; it is growing around the globe.”⁷⁶

The historical development of the emerging church can be seen in North America, the United Kingdom, and across the globe. While the speed and scope of the development of the emerging church differs from region to region certain specific examples can be

⁷⁴ Rollins writes, “Those involved in the conversation are not explicitly attempting to construct or unearth a different set of believers that would somehow be more appropriate in today’s context, but rather they are looking at the way in which we hold the beliefs that we already have. This is not then a revolution that seeks to change what we believe, but rather one that sets about transforming the entire manner in which we hold our beliefs.” Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 7.

⁷⁵ Mobsby, *Emerging and Fresh Expressions of Church*, 23–24.

⁷⁶ Jones, *The New Christians*, 52.

highlighted. For example, Ryan Bolger and Eddie Gibbs link the development of the emerging church to Gen-X (generation-x) churches that paved a new way forward in the U.S., beginning in the late 1980s.⁷⁷ While those leading the Gen-X churches eventually began to question the generationally divided nature of their churches, many within these churches began to experiment with new culturally relevant and diverse practices. Leaders began to realize that Gen-X ministry was not about age, but culture.⁷⁸ Some of these leaders would begin to create what would later be known as emerging churches.⁷⁹ The emerging church did develop and grow from some of the seeds of the Gen-X church experiments.

Within the U.K. the seeds for the emerging church's growth were sown through other means than the Gen-X church movement in the U.S. The club culture of the 1980s provided ample influence on the eventual development of the emerging church.⁸⁰ The club culture of the U.K. led to a contextual response by the church. The initial church that mixed club culture with Christ is the Nine O'Clock Service (NOS). NOS pioneered an entirely new form of worship for the Anglican Church.⁸¹ NOS as a church provided a powerful model of an initial postmodern church. Along with the development of NOS grew the alternative worship movement in the late 1980s.⁸² This movement emphasized contextualized participatory worship that would morph into the emerging church. From the influence of NOS, other alternative worship churches, and others creating new

⁷⁷ Gen-X churches are churches geared and led by people born in "generation-x". Generation-x refers to those born in the period that followed the baby boom (the dates range from 1961-1981). Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 30-34.

⁷⁸ Kimball, "Origin of the terms 'Emerging' and 'Emergent' Church - Part 1," no pages.

⁷⁹ For example such leaders as Chris Seay at University Baptist in Waco, Mark Driscoll with Mars Hill in Seattle (he is initially included in the emerging church but recently has broken off with the emerging church), Dan Kimball with Graceland, and others like Pete Greig and Karen Ward.

⁸⁰ Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 81.

⁸¹ Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 83.

⁸² Collins, "A Definition of Alternative Worship," no pages.

grassroots movements, the emerging church began to coalesce into a movement within the U.K.

Around the world the emerging church began to develop and reach a level of prominence in the 1990s. Within Australia and New Zealand, Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost plot the development of the emerging church to have begun in the early 1990s.⁸³ Tony Jones shares that the specific development of *Emergent*, a friendship of some emerging churches, began in the late 1990s.⁸⁴ Andrew Jones contends that the emerging church developed first within the U.K. rather than the U.S.⁸⁵ While the specific date of the surfacing of the emerging church is not necessary, it is clear that it developed from the diverse cultural milieu that surrounded it. As communities and individuals began to reflect on reaching the current postmodern world, new forms of theology and ecclesiology would begin to coalesce into a theological and praxis-based movement called the emerging church. Therefore the emerging church developed simultaneously as a result of its theological inquiry and praxis. Miroslav Volf, a key theologian utilized by the emerging church, writes, “Practices are essentially belief-shaped, and beliefs are essentially practice-shaping.”⁸⁶ For the emerging church both its practices and beliefs were essential in developing its ecclesiology.

The diversity found within the emerging church’s development is still found within its practice. While there certainly are leaders in the emerging church there is not one leader who speaks authoritatively for the entire movement. This has led to diversity

⁸³ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 9.

⁸⁴ “The emergent phenomenon began in the late 1990’s when a group of Christian leaders began a conversation about how postmodernism was affecting the faith.” Jones, *The New Christians*, 41.

⁸⁵ Andrew Jones has contended that the emerging church in the U.K. predates the U.S. development. Jones, “My History of the Emerging Church. Part One,” no pages.

⁸⁶ Volf, “Theology for a Way of Life”, 254.

within the movement.⁸⁷ There also is no specific doctrinal statement that pertains to everyone within the emerging church.⁸⁸ Instead there is a commitment to certain values outlined below, and reaching the world for Jesus Christ. What is key to grasp is not that the emerging church sees itself as separate from the forms of church that preceded it, but instead sees itself as a continuation of the church, as a whole, in a postmodern world. Phyllis Tickle writes, “The Great Emergence has given rise to a form of Christianity called, not apart from itself, but rather after itself.”⁸⁹ The emerging church is seeking to reach a post-modern, post-industrial, and post-individualistic culture with the gospel of Christ. In short, the emerging church is a postmodern development of church designed to be on mission within a postmodern setting to proclaim the Lordship of Christ.

The Conceptual Development of the Emerging Church: Postmodernism, Praxis, and Post-Evangelicalism

The previous section deals with the historical development of the emerging church. This section provides an examination of the conceptual development of the emerging church. Scot McKnight discusses the emerging church in terms of four rivers that flow into “lake emerging”: postmodernism, praxis, political, and post-evangelical.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Having no single spokesperson for the emerging church makes it difficult, if not impossible, to critique the emerging church by focusing on individuals rather than values and practices. This is why the critique of D. A. Carson in *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, falls short as it focuses on Brian McLaren and Steve Chalke almost exclusively. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, 157–87.

⁸⁸ Some within the emerging church specifically resist the very nature of doctrinal statements. For example, LeRon Shults writing for *Emergent* states, “the very idea of a “statement of faith” is mired in modernist assumptions and driven by modernist anxieties. . . . Such an approach presupposes a Platonic or Cartesian representationalist view of language that has been undermined in late modernity by a variety of disciplines. . . . As well emergents aim to facilitate a conversation . . . a ‘statement of faith’ tends to stop conversation. Such statements can also easily become tools for manipulating or excluding people from the community.” Shults, “The Doctrinal Statement,” no pages. For another viewpoint on how to create and develop emerging doctrinal statements see Perriman, *Otherways*, 14.

⁸⁹ Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 120.

⁹⁰ The metaphor and much of the information in this section is from Scot McKnight’s paper on the emerging church. His paper was originally given at Westminster Seminary and then posted online as a

The metaphor of different conceptual streams flowing into a cohesive movement, “lake emerging,” is appropriate as it highlights the diversity in the conceptual development that has led to the emerging church. For the purposes of this thesis three rivers will be discussed: postmodernism, praxis, and post-evangelical.⁹¹ These three rivers provide an appropriate foundation for understanding the conceptual development that led to the emerging church.⁹²

The first river that flows into lake emerging is the postmodern river. Some have found their way into the emerging church through interacting with postmodernism.⁹³ Andrew Perriman writes, “to describe this movement . . . as ‘postmodern’ serves primarily to acknowledge that it is in some sense a self-conscious and deliberate move away from modernism as a philosophical stance and modernity as a state of culture.”⁹⁴ The emerging church has developed as it has deliberately moved away from modernity. Postmodernity realizes that all stories, propositions, and narratives occur within a certain context. The contextualizing of life has led some to reexamine the nature of theology and ecclesiology leading them to the emerging church.⁹⁵ As Christians, pastors, and communities have sought to reach those within postmodern culture some have “floated” into “lake emerging.” There is still diversity within this postmodern river; some minister

downloaded article on Emergent Village at <http://www.emergentvillage.com/weblog/scot-mcknight-on-the-emerging-church>. McKnight, *Five Streams of the Emerging Church*, 9.

⁹¹ I have chosen to not emphasize the political river that McKnight mentions for two reasons. First, within his paper it is too distinctly American. The political river is directly tied to American politics and does not resonate well in other countries. Second, the political river is tied directly to governmental politics (including a discussion of specific parties in the United States), rather than politics in broader sense which he categorizes under the praxis river (such as social justice which has political overtones).

⁹² The three rivers discussed are not necessarily mutually exclusive but can be mutually collaborative to the building of the emerging church.

⁹³ See for example the work of James K. A. Smith, Stanley Grenz, John Franke, and John D. Caputo.

⁹⁴ Perriman, *Otherways*, 16.

⁹⁵ Pagitt, *A Christianity Worth Believing*, 30–31.

to postmoderns, other with postmoderns, and still others as postmoderns.⁹⁶ Regardless of specific individual's take on postmodernism as a philosophy the cultural phenomenon of postmodernity have led to the development of the emerging church.

The second river that has led to the development of the emerging church is praxis. Emerging churches are communities of people who are committed to following Jesus within a postmodern culture.⁹⁷ Praxis shapes theology; theology shapes praxis. When the “incarnation, the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ constitute the shape and content of our communities, our theology follows suit.”⁹⁸ As some individuals and communities begin to practice an incarnational praxis they have found themselves within the emerging church.⁹⁹ A specific example of praxis leading to the emerging church is seen in the emerging church's focus on social justice. Individuals within a traditional church format began to have a sense of dissatisfaction with the amount of focus and action related to the poor and marginalized within a traditional church framework.¹⁰⁰ As a result of this dissatisfaction individuals and communities began to reorganize around a central conviction of justice as a missional principle resulting in a river into the emerging church. In essence praxis situated in a postmodern context has resulted in a conceptual shift within both theology and ecclesiology that has resulted in the emerging church.

The third river leading to the development of the emerging church is post-evangelical. The emerging church is rightly termed post-evangelical. As people became frustrated with traditional evangelical churches and sought out new forms of spirituality

⁹⁶ McKnight, *Five Streams of the Emerging Church*, 12–14.

⁹⁷ Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 51.

⁹⁸ Keel, *Intuitive Leadership*, 165.

⁹⁹ For instance see Shane Claiborne and his personal journey in Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution*, 17–29; also see the writings of Rob Bell specifically Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, 10–14.

¹⁰⁰ Both Rob Bell and Shane Claiborne both represent a praxis orientated move because of social justice concerns. See both Bell and Golden, *Jesus Wants to Save Christians*, 118–138, and Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution*, 72–89.

the emerging church began to develop.¹⁰¹ Jim Belcher highlights seven areas of post-evangelicalism, or protest against the traditional evangelical church, within the emerging church.¹⁰² First, the emerging church protests against captivity to Enlightenment rationalism, preferring a more holistic approach to theology and ministry. Second, the emerging church reacts against a narrow view of salvation that is reduced to primarily the penal-substitutionary atonement theory. Third, the emerging church disagrees that belief precedes belonging. Fourth, the emerging church protests against uncontextualized worship that is separated from the culture surrounding the church. Fifth, the emerging church reacts against ineffective preaching that has been reduced to information as opposed to spiritual formation. Sixth, those within the emerging church have become post-evangelical because of a weak ecclesiology of the traditional evangelical church that has not allowed for renewal. Seventh, the emerging church protests against the tribalism rather than the missional outworking of the traditional evangelical church. Belcher argues that from these seven areas people have moved from the traditional evangelical church into the emerging church.¹⁰³

Conceptually, much within the emerging church has developed because of its interaction with postmodernism, its new praxis, and its disillusionment with traditional evangelicalism. While there are certainly other factors for the development of the emerging church these three certainly play a critical role in its development.

¹⁰¹ See Dave Tomlinson's book, *The Post-Evangelical*, 23–25.

¹⁰² Jim Belcher writes, "We need to define [the emerging church] as a movement, particularly its theology. The best way to do this is to look at what the emerging movement is against – the things they are protesting and the reasons why they are calling for change." Such an approach while valuable is essentially a deconstructive or negative approach to defining the emerging church. The emerging church though is not only against some areas with the traditional church, but is also pioneering new forms. Therefore to define the emerging church both what it protests and what it champions must be understood. Belcher, *Deep Church*, 38.

¹⁰³ Belcher, *Deep Church*, 40–43.

Key Values

Situated within the historical and conceptual development mentioned above, the key values of the emerging church can now be highlighted to provide a concrete definition and expression of the emerging church. Its values must be understood within an ecclesiological and postmodern context. While such areas as epistemology and soteriology, for example, are important, the primary driving values within the emerging church are ecclesiological. Scot McKnight writes:

*If you narrow the emerging movement to Emergent Village, and especially to the postmodernist impulse therein, you can probably dismiss this movement as a small fissure in the evangelical movement. But, if you are serious enough to contemplate major trends in the Church today, at an international level, and if you define emerging as many of us do – in mission, or ecclesiological terms, rather than epistemological ones – then you will quickly enough realize that there is a giant elephant in the middle of the Church’s living room. It is the emerging church movement and it is a definite threat to traditional evangelical ecclesiology.*¹⁰⁴

Ecclesiology is truly the orientating centre for the emerging church and therefore centres the values discussed below. It is the ecclesiological innovations and changes that differentiate the emerging church from the traditional church. The values are not simply rational propositions; instead the values are praxis-orientated, shaping the form and structure of the emerging church.

Not only are the values ecclesiological, they are also postmodern. Traditional, modern churches, and the emerging church share many of the same values linguistically. While both the traditional church and the emerging church have similar values the practice of those values is radically different. The difference in value-practice arises from the difference in context and worldview. The emerging church intentionally breaks with

¹⁰⁴ McKnight, *Five Streams of the Emerging Church*, 9 (emphasis original).

modernity and endeavors to minister in a postmodern world, which shapes its praxis. To understand the postmodern praxis of the emerging church the “post” nature of their worldview must be understood.¹⁰⁵ The “post” nature of the emerging church can be briefly understood as being post-individualistic, post-rationalistic, post-noeticentric, post-dualistic, post-attractional, and post-conversional. In each of those six values the emerging church, following postmodernism, transcends and includes the binaries inherent within their classification.¹⁰⁶

The emerging church is post-individualistic. This means that the church both welcomes or includes individuals, yet realizes the great importance of the social networks that define an individual. Postmodernism’s influence on the emerging church has caused it to reject “the modern paradigm with its focus on the self-reflective, self-determining, autonomous subject who stands outside any tradition or community. In its place the new communitarians offer a constructive alternative: the individual-within-community.”¹⁰⁷ The individual-within-community is a key concept within the emerging church. The individual is a member of the community in a mutually determining relationship. The community surrounding the individual influences and effects the individual and vice versa. The post-individualistic nature of the emerging church has led to reimagining of leadership structures, Scriptural hermeneutics, and other areas. For example, leadership is being envisioned communally. Leadership is diffused and empowered rather than being held by a pastor or small group of leaders.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, the importance of the community

¹⁰⁵ It should be noted that the preposition “post” is in no sense a value judgment. As David Bosch writes the term “post” is used namely as a “heuristic notion, as a search concept. The term ‘post’ looks backward and forward at the same time.” Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 531.

¹⁰⁶ For a treatment on how postmodernism allows for the transcending and inclusion of values see Ken Wilber’s discussion of the topic in *A Theory for Everything*. Wilber, *A Theory of Everything*, 46–58.

¹⁰⁷ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 168.

¹⁰⁸ For an example of this style of leadership see Cole, *Organic Leadership*, 85–96.

rather than the individual, in understanding and interpreting Scripture is prevalent in emerging churches.¹⁰⁹ The emerging church is then post-individualistic: including individuals, yet transcending a purely autonomous understanding of personhood and developing an appreciation of community.

Following the route of post-individualism, the emerging church is post-rationalistic. Being post-rationalistic does not mean being irrational; it simply means that meaning is found in multiple ways, including reason. The emerging church then transcends reason as the ultimate signifier, while including reason within its worldview. David Bosch writes that in the postmodern paradigm, “Rationality has to be expanded”.¹¹⁰ This is precisely what is occurring within the emerging church. Reason contributes to the quest for a Christlike life, yet does not define the quest. In this way the emerging church can be said to be post-rationalistic, yet still rational and reasonable. This post-rationalistic understanding generates room for mystery, “not as an irrational complement to the rational but as a reminder that the fundamental reality of God transcends human rationality.”¹¹¹ Mystery allows for paradox, for doubt, and for a journey of faith that was bracketed out in a strict Enlightenment viewpoint.¹¹² Bosch writes, “Metaphor, symbol, ritual, sign, and myth, long maligned by those interested only in ‘exact’ expressions of rationality, are today being rehabilitated.”¹¹³ Metaphor and ritual are being rehabilitated in the emerging church as it becomes post-rational. The value of post-rationality is also affecting other areas of the emerging church including apologetics.

¹⁰⁹ For examples of this see, Pagitt, *Reimagining Spiritual Formation*, 85–99 and Merold Westphal, *Whose Community? Which Interpretation?*, 135–46.

¹¹⁰ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 353.

¹¹¹ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 170.

¹¹² While mystery is important, and having space for doubt is equally important, belief is the organizing principle for the emerging church. When doubt becomes institutionalized within a system, momentum is lost which eventually leads to death. Alan Hirsch, “A Day with Alan Hirsch.”

¹¹³ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 353.

Apologetics based on reason is important, but within the emerging church apologetics is based on experience with a rational component.¹¹⁴ In a post-rationalistic worldview experiential understanding becomes crucial. In essence a holistic approach to understanding involving reason, experience, expression, and emotion is fostered.

The emerging church is post-noeticentric. The emerging church values knowledge, but does not want to simply amass knowledge.¹¹⁵ Knowledge is no longer the goal in the emerging church. Wisdom, or knowledge applied, is more coherent with the emerging church's ethos. Knowledge is still important within the emerging church, as it wrestles with concepts of epistemology, soteriology, and culture. What is truly important for the emerging church is faith expressed in love (Gal 5:6).¹¹⁶ The emerging church values knowledge in action, or praxis. The distinction between knowledge and action no longer holds within the emerging church. Instead, knowledge and action are in a symbiotic relationship. Therefore the goal of life is not to amass more knowledge, or to have only orthodox beliefs, but to act in a Christlike manner in all situations. Tony Jones writes, "The conviction is that theology and practice are inextricably related, and each invariably informs the other."¹¹⁷ A post-noeticentric faith elevates praxis and the relational aspect of belief. Belief is not just assenting to doctrines but instead is a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ. For the emerging church the test of theology

¹¹⁴ David Bosch, following Gregory of Nazianzus, argues that "true rationality . . . also includes experience . . . We should indeed, retain and defend the critical power of the Enlightenment, but we should reject its reductionism." Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 353–354.

¹¹⁵ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 173.

¹¹⁶ Peter Rollins explores the philosophic and theological underpinnings of the emerging church in his book *How (Not) to Speak of God*. He ends off the book arguing for the importance of faith in God, as expressed in love. He writes, "to affirm the approach that I am advocating means that we must accept that to be a Christian is to be born of love, transformed by love and committed to transforming the world with love. This is not somehow done by working ourselves up and trying to find the right way of thinking and acting, but rather in letting go and opening up to the transformative power of God." Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 71.

¹¹⁷ Jones, *The New Christians*, 105.

must “be relational, not propositional.”¹¹⁸ Theology and knowledge must move from being purely rational to fully relational. Commitment to Christ must capture one’s mind and knowledge, as well as one’s heart and action. As Stanley Grenz writes, “Beliefs are important because they shape conduct.”¹¹⁹ The emerging church seeks to have its conduct and confessional beliefs shaped by Jesus Christ. The Enlightenment elevated knowledge; similarly postmodernism seeks to elevate practice. The response of the emerging church is to incorporate both knowledge and action into incarnational mission in a post-noeticentric fashion.

The emerging church is post-dualistic. The emerging church seeks to serve and minister in a holistic fashion. Divisions that were common within the Enlightenment are both transcended and included within postmodernism.¹²⁰ No longer is there any antagonism between spirit and body. Instead the emerging church seeks to minister to both the individual and the community in a holistic way that includes mind, body, soul, and spirit. Ministering as a whole means recognizing the interconnected way in which both individuals and communities are made up. The emerging church seeks to partner with God in bringing reconciliation and redemption to the entire world in each and every way.

The emerging church is post-attractional by focusing on mission rather than attraction. The emerging church is “post” attractional though because it believes that a properly lived missional lifestyle will be attractional to others.¹²¹ Therefore the emerging church is not anti-attractional but believes that the focus must be on incarnational-

¹¹⁸ Burke, “Response to Mark Driscoll,” 37.

¹¹⁹ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 178.

¹²⁰ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 177.

¹²¹ Halter and Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom Primer*, 2.1–2.7.

missional activity, which creates the attraction as Jesus becomes more evident. The attractional nature of traditional evangelical churches is contrasted with the emerging church because of its understanding of its nature as a sent body. Mission and being missional are at the heart of the emerging church. The church is not primarily defined by who is a part of it, but by the mission of God. Therefore, in essence the emerging church exists for those not yet a part of it. This is in direct contrast to a “Christendom church,” where church became a place “you went to instead of a people you belonged with.”¹²² The emerging church is a group of people on a shared mission, collectively seeking to impact the world in glocal way.¹²³ The church is not a place to go but a way of being within the world. Mission becomes defining in the emerging church, in a post-attractional fashion. Mission requires Christians to be sent out. This outward sending impulse is post-attractional, as the focus is on going rather than gathering. The missional aspect of the emerging church does not negate it becoming attractional. Rather than the attraction being based on physical spaces, events, or marketing, it is based on the presence and power of Jesus Christ within an individual and church. The emerging church is therefore post-attractional, focusing on reaching out in mission which, because of its incarnational witness, becomes attractional.

The emerging church is post-conversional. The modern church focused on growth that was measured in terms of addition and conversion.¹²⁴ Within the emerging church there is a shift towards being post-conversional. The emerging church still values conversion, yet places a higher emphasis on multiplication rather than individual

¹²² Halter and Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom*, 54.

¹²³ Glocal is a combination of the two terms local and global. Glocal refers to having a combined local and global viewpoint or activity.

¹²⁴ Fitch, *The Great Giveaway*, 27–32.

additions to a church. Within modernity there is a strong focus on growing larger, often shaped by consumeristic business practices.¹²⁵ Growth is desired in emerging churches but in an organic and natural way, as opposed to an institutional and attractional way. Rather than growing large, the emerging church seeks to grow exponentially.¹²⁶ The emerging church then seeks to plant more churches, and multiply basic beliefs and structures. This focus on multiplication is an outworking of the primary worldview of the emerging church as a missionary movement rather than an institution. In this sense the emerging church can be said to be post-conversional; rather than seeking individual conversions, it seeks to multiply as the natural outworking of God.

In general the emerging church is a post-modern reinterpretation of faith. The emerging church is seeking to include the valuable aspects of modernity while seeking to transcend their limitations. The preceding discussion provides a view of the landscape and perimeter of the emerging church's worldview. With a proper appreciation for the "post" nature of the emerging church, the specific core values that encompass it can be better appreciated. The values discovered by Bolger and Gibbs must be understood in a "post"-modern context rather than being appropriated for modern thought. When these values are understood in a "post-modern" perspective their uniqueness and flavor become apparent. Emerging churches practice their values in a post-individualistic, post-rationalistic, post-noeticentric, post-dualistic, post-attractional, and post-conversional way. These values are lived out in the pluralistic global marketplace of today's society. The values are based upon a belief in engagement with culture and others. The emerging church is then an ecclesiological envisioning of Christian life in a postmodern context.

¹²⁵ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 65.

¹²⁶ Hirsch, "A Day with Alan Hirsch."

Churches must display the values and worldview elaborated above to truly be called “emerging.” Regardless of marketing, self-labeling, or desires, the values must be seen in practice for a church to be included as an emerging church.

Summary

The emerging church is a global movement that has come to a level of prominence within the past ten to fifteen years. Emerging churches have developed in a diverse historical way that is echoed within its diverse conceptual development. The postmodern values of the emerging church include: being post-individualistic, post-rationalistic, post-noeticentric, post-dualistic, post-attractional, and post-conversional. In general, the emerging church is a complex movement that seeks to incorporate many disparate elements into a whole mosaic. This mosaic is then applied to the different contexts that specific churches find themselves a part of. The key is that the nine core values of the emerging church (as set out by Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger) are set in a postmodern context, and provide guidance for both the practice of the emerging church and the distinctives necessary to be included in the movement. Specific creeds do not identify an emerging church; the values and missional-incarnational living identifies the emerging church. The emerging church is a new movement that is offering a new re-envisioning of both theology and ecclesiology that is evaluated in the next three chapters.

CHAPTER 2: THE EVALUATIVE CRITERIA FOR THE EMERGING CHURCH

Introduction

Properly evaluating the emerging church is crucial if we are to advocate for its continued development and growth. This chapter focuses on evaluating theologically the ecclesiology, or theological praxis, of the emerging church. The emerging church is a re-invention of ecclesiology in light of its theological convictions.¹²⁷ While evaluating the emerging church in terms of its epistemology, soteriology, or various other factors is possible, such an evaluation will not generate a conclusive argument. Simply put, a conclusive argument for the positive or negative contribution of the emerging church can only be generated through a thoroughly theological evaluation of the emerging church's ecclesiology. All other types of evaluations, while important within their sub-segments and possible course-corrections, miss the central defining mark of the emerging church: the fact that it is a church first and foremost. John Caputo, a postmodern philosopher, writes, "Religion . . . must be tested to see how loyal it is to itself, to its religious vocation, which is the love of God."¹²⁸ The emerging church is no different. It must be evaluated on its love of God, both in thought and action.

Evaluating Ecclesiology

A central task of theology "is to bring its ideas and values into the everyday of life, where they may be enacted and put to the test."¹²⁹ This thesis seeks to bring two key areas of theology, mission and Christology (incarnational theology), to the forefront so

¹²⁷ For a clear example of this see *Stories of Emergence*. This emergent work focuses primarily on a protest of ecclesiology rather than epistemology. Mike Yaconelli, *Stories of Emergence*, 13–103.

¹²⁸ Caputo, *On Religion*, 3.

¹²⁹ Fishbane, *Sacred Attunement*, 108.

that the emerging church's ecclesiology can be evaluated. Theologically speaking there are two defining factors for determining ecclesiology: Christology and missiology. Christology directs missiology, which directs ecclesiology.¹³⁰ Therefore in evaluating the emerging church's ecclesiology two primary criteria are used: first, whether or not the emerging church is incarnational (Christology); second, whether or not the emerging church is missional (missiology). Evaluating the emerging church by these two criteria allows for the diverse contextualized practices found within it, by focusing on its convictions that shape its praxis. This allows for the evaluation to remain conclusive across a broad spectrum of practices. The missional/incarnational evaluation is therefore essential and poised to produce worthwhile conclusions. These two criteria will be explored in terms of their biblical basis, the respective principles that they teach, and the overall trajectory that they bring to ecclesiology.

Incarnational

The Incarnation is a sublime and wonderful moment when God took on flesh in the body and person of Jesus Christ. This event is paradigmatic not only for the Christian faith but also for the Christian understanding of God. In Jesus God is revealed and thereby our revelation of God is necessarily grounded in the person and work, of Jesus Christ.

The incarnational activity of God provides the basis for the emerging church's relational praxis. Theology centred on Christ provides the understanding of God's missional activity. God in his coming, enfleshing, and activity in the person of Jesus

¹³⁰ Mark Driscoll disagrees with this structure believing that Christology defines ecclesiology, which in turn defines missiology. This is partly why he is not included within the literature, or as an example of an emerging church. Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformation Rev*, 41.

provides emerging churches with a model for their own symbiotic missional activity. Jesus is the lens through which God's missional activity and calling for the emerging church is viewed. The theology of the Incarnation is examined below, followed by biblical principles that highlight what an incarnational life looks like.

A Theology of the Incarnation

The Incarnation is a seemingly paradoxical belief. Specifically the Incarnation is the reality that the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. Jürgen Moltmann writes, "Incarnation is the moment in which the divine and human natures are united in the one person of the God-human being."¹³¹ There has been considerable debate concerning how Jesus' divine nature relates to his humanity.¹³² While there has been debate concerning how the two natures are related, all orthodox Christians affirm the belief that Jesus is both truly human and truly God.¹³³ Stanley Grenz summarizes, "The patristic church bequeathed to us the legacy of affirming that Jesus is at the same time fully divine and fully human, and that he is one person in whom the two natures are neither fully separable nor fused."¹³⁴ From the Incarnation some key points can be made. First, that the Incarnation is revelatory, both of God and of humanity. Second, that the Incarnation implies participation in the divine and in true humanity.

¹³¹ Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 50.

¹³² For example there has been the Nestorian controversy, the Eutychian controversy, and the Reformation debate. For more see Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 295–299.

¹³³ The Chalcedonian formulation at the Fourth Ecumenical Council, held at Chalcedon in 451, became the standard for all orthodox Christianity, in this regard. The Chalcedonian Council states, "We confess one and the same our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead, the same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, the same of a rational soul and body, acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, the difference of the two natures being by no means taken away because of the union but rather the distinctive character of each nature being preserved and combining in one person (*prosopon*) or entity (*hypostatis*)." Newlands, "Christology", 103.

¹³⁴ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 299.

A key point within the Incarnation is that Jesus is both human and divine revealing both natures to humanity.¹³⁵ Ian Mobsby writes that “in the ancient world the experience of the self-revealing activity of God is the means by which we learn who God is, what God is like, and therefore how we name God.”¹³⁶ This naming of God has occurred fully in the person of Jesus Christ. Lesslie Newbigin writes, “In the Incarnation of the Son [the Father] has made known his nature and purpose fully and completely, for in Jesus ‘all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell’ (Col 1:19).”¹³⁷ The fact that God took on flesh in the person of Jesus means that Jesus is truly God and Godlike in everyway. God is revealed in Jesus; conversely the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is a revelation of God. Moltmann writes, “The Incarnation of the Son is the perfected self-communication of the triune God to his world.”¹³⁸ Jesus is the supreme revelation of God, and no one needs to look any further than him to discover God (John 1:18 and 14:9). Grenz writes, “Because [Jesus] functions as the truly divine and the truly human one, we conclude that Jesus reveals the nature of God and of humanity”.¹³⁹ In the Incarnation both the divine and true humanity are revealed. Therefore not only is Jesus Christ worthy of our worship, because of his divinity, but also of our emulation, because of his humanity.

Since the Incarnation is revelatory it also implies participation of the divine in the humanity and humanity in the divine. Grenz writes:

Inherent in revelation is participation. To the extent that a revelatory agent truly discloses the essence of something, the vehicle of disclosure must participate in the reality it discloses. In other words, ‘revelation of’ implies a certain

¹³⁵ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 304.

¹³⁶ Mobsby, *The Becoming of G-d*, 17.

¹³⁷ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 118.

¹³⁸ Moltmann, *The Trinity and The Kingdom*, 116.

¹³⁹ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 304.

‘participation in’. Insofar as Jesus discloses both essential deity and essential humanity he must participate in the divine and human realities.¹⁴⁰

Jesus took on flesh and participated in humanity. Though Jesus was without sin, he entered into the human condition and fully identified with humanity (John 1:14; 2 Pet 2:2). Moltmann writes, “In the Incarnation of the Son the Triune God enters into the limited, finite situation. Not only does he enter into this state of being man; he accepts and adopts it himself, making it part of his own, eternal life. He becomes *the human God*.”¹⁴¹ The Incarnation is a participatory reality as the eternal Son of God, participates in humanity. The eternal Son of God, also fully participates in the divine community of the Trinity. In this respect, Jesus participates in the “reciprocal interiority” of the Trinity.¹⁴² Miroslav Volf explains, “In every divine person as a subject, the other persons also indwell; all mutually permeate one another, though in so doing they do not cease to be distinct person.”¹⁴³ Therefore the Incarnation has a participatory element as Jesus participates both in humanity and in divinity.

The participatory nature of the Incarnation generates some key principles. First, it means that it is from within the human condition that Jesus saves the human race. Through Jesus’ own “abandonment by God, the crucified Christ brings God to those who are abandoned by God. Through his suffering he brings salvation to those who suffer. Through his death he brings eternal life to those who are dying.”¹⁴⁴ Jesus from within humanity provides salvation. The creator “becomes like the created to give new life to

¹⁴⁰ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 304.

¹⁴¹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 118 (emphasis original).

¹⁴² Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 209.

¹⁴³ Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 209.

¹⁴⁴ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 46.

creation”.¹⁴⁵ The Incarnation is about Jesus identifying and participating with humanity in order to bring them to God. God “became man, so that men could partake of God.”¹⁴⁶ In this way the Incarnation is missional. The Incarnation, “is the fulfillment of a Trinitarian mission, a sending out in order to bring back.”¹⁴⁷ God is seeking to redeem, restore, and build a love relationship with humanity. There is a purposeful nature to Jesus’ Incarnation, death, and resurrection. Jesus takes on “transitory, mortal being, for that which is transitory and mortal to become intransitory and immortal.”¹⁴⁸ Salvation comes through the Son of God from within the mortal human state. Jesus participates in humanity to allow humanity to partake of the divine. As God participates in humanity, in the person of Jesus Christ, he redeems humanity.

Second, the participatory nature of the Incarnation has communal implications. Grenz writes, “As the revelation of God, Jesus participates in the divine life. . . . As the revelation of essential humanity, he also participates in true human life.”¹⁴⁹ As mentioned previously, Jesus participates in the divine reciprocal interiority that characterizes the inner life of the Trinity. In essence Jesus exists in a divine reality in which personhood and relation-to-others are not separated as they are in us. LeRon Shults writes:

We cannot hold our personhood and our relations to others (or to *the Other*) together. . . . But there is One whose personhood is constituted by self-relationality and infinite love, in who there is no bifurcation between being and relation, One who holds all things together.¹⁵⁰

The Incarnation is a supreme revelation of the inner life of God, of which there is a reciprocal interiority. Conversely the Incarnation also reveals Jesus Christ as fully

¹⁴⁵ McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, 56.

¹⁴⁶ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 88.

¹⁴⁷ Vanhoozer, “Introduction”, 24.

¹⁴⁸ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 88.

¹⁴⁹ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 305.

¹⁵⁰ Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 92–93.

participatory in the human life. Jesus participates in humanity as the true Image of God. Moltmann comments, “As the perfect Man of God, Jesus is the fulfilment of our destiny as the image of God which we have not fulfilled.”¹⁵¹ Jesus simultaneously participates and reveals humanity’s destiny as the image of God. Therefore in Jesus Christ the dimension of community, divine and human, are brought together. Jesus then as one who fully participates in divinity and humanity becomes a mediator between the two realities. Jesus then meditates “to us the fellowship of the new humanity, which he shares with all who are united in him through the Holy Spirit.”¹⁵² Because of the Incarnation not only can one now have true human community with others, but true community with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Jesus in John 17:20–21 says, “I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” Jesus shares with humanity their destiny if they embrace him, and his message. Through Jesus Christ, humanity is brought into community with the Father, and Spirit. Simply put, because Jesus participates in both human life and divine life he allows Christians to partake in the divine life. This reality then has significant implications for human life. Human life and community can then only be truly experienced and grasped through Jesus Christ. In short, Jesus is the only way to participate in true life and commune with the divine (John 10:10).

In summary, the Incarnation is both simultaneously revelatory and participatory. One key aspect of the Incarnation deserves further exploration: that the Incarnation both reveals God as loving and invites participation in God’s love. The Incarnation cannot

¹⁵¹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 96.

¹⁵² Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 305.

simply be viewed as a functional remedy for sin. For if this was the case, then as Moltmann points out, “once the incarnate Son of God has achieved the reconciliation of the world with God, he himself becomes superfluous.”¹⁵³ Instead of the Incarnation being a functional response to sin, it is a divine revelation, and outworking of love. Jesus says that it is out of love that the Father sent him to earth (John 3:16). The Incarnation is a response of God’s love towards humanity. In the Incarnation God “binds himself to humanity”.¹⁵⁴ For Jürgen Moltmann love grounds and propels the Incarnation. The Incarnation is “neither a matter of indifference for God nor is it necessary for his divinity.”¹⁵⁵ Instead the Incarnation is part of God’s loving self-communication.¹⁵⁶ In this way the Incarnation is both a revelation of God’s love, and an invitation to participate in God’s love. Jürgen Moltmann elaborates:

Self-communicating love . . . only becomes fulfilled, blissful love when its love is returned. That is why the Father finds bliss in the eternal response to his love through the Son. If he communicates his love for the Son creatively through him to the one who is other than himself [(humanity)], then he also desires to find bliss through this other’s responsive love.¹⁵⁷

The Incarnation, as an act of love, only finds its true fulfillment in humanity’s responsive love. In essence, God through the Incarnation is inviting humanity to participate in his love. Kevin Vanhoozer writes that the Incarnation is “God’s act of love toward humanity.”¹⁵⁸ The self-communicating love of God, as evidenced in the Incarnation, is not only a revelation of God’s love but also a divine invitation. God desires humanity’s loving response to his sending of his Son. Therefore the Incarnation is then both a

¹⁵³ Moltmann, *The Trinity and The Kingdom*, 115.

¹⁵⁴ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 170.

¹⁵⁵ Moltmann, *The Trinity and The Kingdom*, 117.

¹⁵⁶ Moltmann, *The Trinity and The Kingdom*, 117.

¹⁵⁷ Moltmann, *The Trinity and The Kingdom*, 117.

¹⁵⁸ Vanhoozer, “Introduction”, 24.

revelation of God's love and an invitation to participate in his love. Grenz summarizes the Incarnation writing, "In this one historical, personal life we find revealed who God is and who we are to be – true deity and true humanity."¹⁵⁹

Developing the Term Incarnational

Previously in the section dealing with key terms a preliminary definition of the term "incarnational" was given. This section seeks to elaborate on that definition providing a more thorough examination of the term, its relationship to the Incarnation, and its usage.

The term incarnational is an adjectival form of the word Incarnation, yet there are some very specific nuanced differences between the two terms. The term Incarnation is a theological term that refers to the union of the human and divine nature of the eternal Son of God, in the person of Jesus Christ. The term incarnational is not nearly as precise as the term Incarnation, having a larger semantic range. Incarnational refers to a community or individual representing and reflecting Jesus. Therefore Jesus' actions, beliefs, attitude, and posture provide the boundary for what constitutes being "incarnational." To be incarnational means to accurately represent and reflect Jesus Christ in terms of his morals, motivation, and mission. Therefore it logically follows that to be incarnational requires an individual or community to be grounded in Jesus Christ. To be incarnational requires abiding in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. In this way the term incarnational is grounded in the living person of Jesus Christ. Occasionally as well the term is used more generally to simply refer to a "Jesus-centred" approach to life or theology.

¹⁵⁹ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 310–311.

The relationship between the term incarnational and the Incarnation is important. Incarnational, as a term, only has meaning in reference to Jesus. If a theology or ministry is “incarnational” it is only so if it reflects Jesus Christ. Just as the Incarnation has a participatory and revelatory function so does the term incarnational. Incarnational as an activity must be grounded in the life and revelation Jesus. Therefore to be incarnational necessitates a revelatory function, so that people can come to know God. In the Incarnation Jesus came to humanity to lead them back to God. In the same way any incarnational activity must have the mission of redemption at its forefront. Alan Hirsch writes, “the basic motive of incarnational ministry is . . . revelatory – that [people] may come to God through Jesus”.¹⁶⁰ The revelatory nature of incarnational life is highly important. As Lesslie Newbigin points out if an individual accepts Jesus as their savior, “then the Jesus whom he accepts will be the Jesus presented to him by the missionary. It will be Jesus as the missionary perceives him”.¹⁶¹ Therefore to be incarnational comes with a high calling. One must as accurately as possible reflect Jesus Christ in each and every aspect of life. Each individual and community must continue to evaluate themselves to ensure that they truly reflect Christ if they are to attempt to be incarnational. In essence, to be incarnational, as based upon the Incarnation, necessitates the revelation of Jesus Christ as Lord.

Incarnational, as a term, also entails participation. Primarily to be incarnational necessitates participating in Jesus Christ. One cannot be incarnational unless one is actively participating, abiding, and present within Jesus Christ. This participation implies becoming like Christ and becoming new (2 Cor 5:17). It is only through participating in

¹⁶⁰ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 133.

¹⁶¹ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 8.

Jesus Christ that a believer becomes truly alive (1 Cor 15:22). In this sense then participating in Christ goes beyond simply acting like Christ. A person can act like Christ but not participate in him. For example someone can be generous, but unless they are participating in Jesus Christ they cannot be incarnational. In John 15:4 Jesus says, “Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.” To be incarnational means to remain in Christ. No one can bear any fruit without incarnationally participating in Jesus Christ. To be incarnational necessitate participation in Jesus Christ.

The participatory nature of being incarnational also includes participating in the body of believers, along with Jesus Christ. One cannot be incarnational and be self-autonomous. Instead to be incarnational is to participate in the body of believers, who are in Christ. Participating in Christ requires participating communally with other believers as well. Paul writes, “in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Rom 12:5). There is a clear communal aspect to participating in Christ. Therefore to be incarnational means to actively participate in the body of Christ recognizing the mutual symmetry of belonging inherent within that participation. Oneness between the members of Christ’s body is the standard (Gal 3:28). In this way unity must also accompany participation in Christ. To be incarnational means to participate in unison both with Christ and the other members of his body. To be incarnational is then not simply to act like Christ but participate in him, and his body of believers in unity.

In summary, incarnational, as a term, is grounded in the Incarnation. The Incarnation of the eternal Son of God in Jesus Christ is the paradigm for incarnational life. To be incarnational necessitates both revelation and participation as demonstrated by Jesus and his Incarnation. Jürgen Moltmann writes, “If the church acquires its existence through the activity of Christ, then her characteristics, too are characteristics of Christ’s activity.”¹⁶² As Moltmann points out the church is to reflect Christ. Therefore being incarnational is also an appropriate evaluative tool for communities, individuals, churches, and activities. Being incarnational, is in essence seeking to appropriately reflect Jesus Christ in a given context. If that reflection does not correctly reveal Jesus then changes must occur. Further below specific principles derived from the life of Jesus, as found in Scripture, provide principles along which to evaluate the incarnational activity of the emerging church.

Incarnational Principles

The following principles are derived from Scripture, and provide a basis from which to evaluate the emerging church. Each of these principles is found within the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. The principles provide the foundation for not only the necessity of mission, but also provide a model for its practice.

1. Incarnation as Going

God the Father sends his Son to earth in full humanity. The Incarnation is a sending activity of God. God’s missional desire for reconciliation and healing prompts him to send his Son (John 3:16). God’s sending is the result of his missional heart of love. In sending Jesus, God takes the initiative. An incarnational perspective puts the onus on the sender and not the receiver. God did not wait for humanity to seek him. Nor

¹⁶² Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 338.

did God try to attract humanity unto himself.¹⁶³ Primarily, God in his desire to reach humanity sent Jesus. The initiative rests with the God who sends, not the people who need to receive. Jesus is clear throughout his teaching that it is God who sent him (John 4:34; 7:16; and 8:42). Jesus is emphasizing his nature as the “sent one.” God takes the initiative and sends his one and only Son to seek and save the lost.¹⁶⁴ To be incarnational necessitates going and reaching out to others.

The “going nature” that is inherent with Christ and his Incarnation must also be inherent within his followers. God sends believers to be part of the world proclaiming Jesus as Lord. Where there is sin, sickness, and death believers are called to go and be the Good News in that context. Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost write, “God is a missionary – he sent his Son into our world, into our lives, into human history. Incarnation therefore implies some form of sending in order to be able to radically incarnate into the various contexts in which disciples live.”¹⁶⁵ The goal for Christians is to go rather than set up spaces that seek to attract non-Christians. The Incarnation is a sending-missionary-movement of God. A genuine missional and incarnational impulse is a “sending rather than an attractional one. The NT pattern of mission is centrifugal rather than centripetal.”¹⁶⁶ Jesus as the model for incarnational living requires Christians to give up their entitlement, to take the first step, and to go be with others. The impetus rests on

¹⁶³ This is not to say that Jesus or God is not attractive to others, or that Jesus does not draw people to himself (as he says in John 12:32). Attraction certainly does happen in relation to God. The point though is that attraction is not primary, and not possible without incarnation. An incarnational life is attractive to others but an attractional focus without incarnational living is doomed to failure.

¹⁶⁴ While this examination is primarily Christological, emphasizing the sending nature of God present within Jesus Christ, there clearly is a Pneumatological aspect of the sending nature of God as well. The Holy Spirit is very clearly sent to believers on Pentecost (Acts 2:2), as well is central in equipping believers for the mission of God (1 Cor 12:4).

¹⁶⁵ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 39.

¹⁶⁶ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 130.

believers to go, not on non-believers to come. A truly incarnational life then rests on a life of movement, of going, of reaching out, and of mission.

2. Incarnation as Posture

The Incarnation is a sending activity of God. God, the Father, sent Jesus Christ to become one with humanity and to become human. In this act Jesus did not cling to his rights and privileges as God but instead laid aside his mighty power and glory and came to earth (Phil 2:6–8).¹⁶⁷ In coming to earth Jesus sets down a path that believers are to follow, a certain posture and behavior that should characterize them. Paul in exhorting the Philippians to be like Jesus writes that their attitudes should be the same as Christ (Phil 2:5). Three areas of posture can be derived from the Incarnation: openness, servanthood, and obedience.

First, believers are to adopt a position of openness. In the Incarnation Jesus radically opened himself up to human experience. Stanley Grenz writes:

Jesus of Nazareth had no predisposing advantages. He travelled no shortcut to maturity, transcended none of the limiting aspect of embodied existence, and was spared no difficulty in living in this fallen world. On the contrary, he was truly one of us; he experienced fully our humanness.¹⁶⁸

Jesus radically opened himself up to the human experience, becoming one with us in our humanity, though without sin. Jesus entered into our world and experienced the world in the way in which humanity does. Jesus in the Incarnation demonstrated a posture of openness to all of humanity.

Not only did Jesus demonstrate a posture of openness to humanity in general but also to specific individuals he came across. Jesus did not simply minister to the wealthy and well-to-do but instead ministered to the disadvantaged, the outcasts, and the sinners.

¹⁶⁷ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 306–8.

¹⁶⁸ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 278.

His ministry was not exclusive but radically included all types of people so much so that he gained the reputation of being a “friend of sinners” (Matt 11:19). Jesus was also open to interacting with women. Jesus openly interacted, encouraged, and astounded the woman at the well in John 4, and had significant relationships with Mary and Martha. Jesus was radically open to both God, and to others. Throughout his ministry Jesus demonstrated a posture of openness.

Second, Paul outlines that a believer’s posture should not only be one of openness, but also of servanthood. Paul writes that 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” (Phil 2:6–7). Jesus did not consider that his position and power defined him. Instead Jesus was willing to give up his position and his power for the sake of humanity. Jesus’ posture to those around him was that of a servant (John 13:1–17). Paul is calling for each Christian to take up this same posture of servanthood as modeled in Jesus Christ and his incarnational activity; a posture based on the position of a servant rather than the position of power is needed within today’s culture and climate. Positions of authority have been abused, and trust in power is very low. People in a postmodern climate are suspicious of power and claims based on authority.¹⁶⁹ Due to this cultural climate a posture of servanthood is more culturally needed than ever. Claims based on authority are no longer trusted, but the work of a servant is championed. Believers must be like Christ and follow Christ’s example; believers must not prioritize the message of grace and love over our posture of grace and

¹⁶⁹ Jean-Francois Lyotard’s definition of postmodernity demonstrates that for postmodern self-legitimizing narratives, hierarchy, and positions of power and authority are treated with suspicion and at some points disdain. He writes, “Simplifying to the extreme. I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives.” Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, xxiv.

love that reflects Christ.¹⁷⁰ The Incarnation compels the church to adopt the same position of Christ, a posture of servanthood.

Third, the posture of Jesus in the Incarnation is centrally a posture of obedience. Jesus cries out to God in the garden asking for God's will, and not his own (Luke 22:42). Paul also speaks of the obedience of Christ. Paul in Philippians writes, "And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8). Jesus in his posture towards God adopted a posture of obedience. He himself says, "The Father and I are one" (John 10:30), and "I have come . . . not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38). Jesus is characterized as going in response to the Father, and following him in all things. Lesslie Newbigin writes:

Jesus manifested a relationship of unbroken love and obedience to the one he called Father, a love and obedience sustained by the unfailing love and faithfulness of that same Father, and that those who believe and follow have been enabled through the presence of the Spirit actually to participate in this shared life of mutual love . . . by being one in the sonship of Jesus.¹⁷¹

Jesus adopts a posture of obedience to God the Father. Newbigin points out that the same style of relationship Jesus had with the Father, characterized by obedience and love, is available for believers as well. In incarnationally living among others in a posture of openness and service, obedience is to characterize the believer's relationship with God. Christians are to radically declare allegiance to Christ. Christ is Lord, and therefore demands total loyalty. As Paul writes, "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:9–11). The believer's knee

¹⁷⁰ Halter and Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom*, 46.

¹⁷¹ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 89.

must bow to Christ in all things. The posture of incarnational believers must be one of allegiance to a crucified and risen king.

3. Incarnation as Close Proximity

The Incarnation necessitates a close connection and proximity with others. Incarnational living requires living close to others to get to know them, support them, and be touched by them. The Incarnation cannot be divorced from connection with community. Incarnational life is not something that can be lived out in individualistic self-interest but only in community-based living. Jesus' Incarnation teaches a principle of living in close proximity to others. Jesus emptied himself and came and lived in humanity's neighborhood. As John says, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). Jesus came and "tabernacled" with us. Eugene Peterson in his translation of the New Testament, *The Message*, writes that Jesus moved into the neighborhood.¹⁷² God made a home within humanity in Jesus Christ. There is an intimacy and immediacy in the connection between Jesus and humanity. Not only was Jesus able to touch humanity, but humanity was able to touch Jesus.

Jesus consistently broke social barriers that segmented and separated society. Barriers that kept people at a distance Jesus broke to become close to "others." Jesus does this in John 4, where he meets with a Samaritan woman in the middle of the day. In Jesus' culture speaking to a woman, a Samaritan, in the middle of the day was crossing strong social taboos. Yet for Jesus the social taboos, or social distinctions, did not define his actions. Instead Jesus' mission of healing, and reconciliation defined his actions. Jesus offered the woman at the well living water (John 4:10-14). Jesus offered freedom of worship, and reconciliation, and to do this he gets physically close. This is the nature

¹⁷² Peterson, *The Message*, John 1:14.

of incarnational life, living close to individuals whom society has set aside. In incarnational living life must be lived in close connection to the down and out, the oppressed, and the “other.”

Jesus also demonstrated this willingness to cross social boundaries by meeting with social outcasts. Leprosy caused many individuals within Jesus’ context to become outcasts. Jesus though, does not let the social stigma or the fear of disease stop him from intervening in the lepers’ lives in dramatic ways. The mission of God requires reaching out to the lepers and Jesus does that in ways that bring him physically close to them. In Mark it says, “Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing’, he said. ‘Be clean!’” (Mark 1:41). Jesus’ compassion for others, and his sense of God’s mission, causes him to physically touch another. Jesus crosses a physical and social barrier coming into close proximity with an individual needing mercy. Close proximity is a requirement for incarnational ministry. Compassion must lead to showing love in close and real ways. Jesus practiced this not only with lepers but also with other outcasts, including sinners and tax collectors. Jesus demonstrated his willingness to physically come close to others by eating and drinking with sinners (Mark 2:15–16). Not only would Jesus enter into their houses, but into their lives. Social taboos did not keep God-Incarnate from moving into the neighborhood. Jesus entered into others’ lives in real, close, and meaningful ways.

The church then must follow the example of Jesus and not pull away from culture and non-Christians, but live life in close proximity with both culture and non-Christians. Living in close proximity with the outcasts necessitates getting dirty and messy, and being associated with those in disrepute. Jesus was judged and condemned for “hanging-

out with tax collectors and sinners” (Luke 5:30). He was associated with the lower classes because he spent time and influence there. Jesus broke the barriers that separated society to reach the world. This same attitude must infect the church and its posture to the world. Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost write, “If the church is living an intriguing new lifestyle that is so marked by goodness that it makes the gospel attractive, then to be truly effective it follows that this lifestyle must be lived in close proximity to not-yet-Christians.”¹⁷³ The Incarnation requires close proximity to others if believers are truly seeking to fulfill God’s missional mandate.

4. Incarnation as Contextualization

In the mystery and majesty of the Incarnation the message of the gospel, in the person of Jesus Christ, becomes contextualized to a certain specific culture and worldview. Jesus contextualized his gospel message of hope to the first century Jewish culture. Jesus made the incomprehensible comprehensible in culturally relevant ways for his specific context. God became revealed in a person, and accessible in a way that has never been seen before. In essence Jesus completely integrated and contextualized himself as the Word, the message of hope, which included giving up his stature and Godly position (Phil 2:6–8).

Jesus in the Incarnation not only reveals that He is the truth but also the nature of truth. The truth of the gospel inhabits cultures, transforms them, shapes them, and provides hope in culturally relevant and specific ways. Christianity has “no culture itself but belongs to all cultures.”¹⁷⁴ Christ comes in a familiar, although unexpected ways. The gospel message as found in the Scriptures is not transcontextual, meaning that it does not

¹⁷³ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 57.

¹⁷⁴ Raschke, *GloboChrist*, 66.

reside outside of context and language. Instead the gospel message is intracontextual, meaning that it inhabits cultures and contexts changing them from within as the Holy Spirit works. In short the Incarnation is translation, “when God in Christ becomes man divinity was translated into humanity, as though humanity were a receptor language.”¹⁷⁵

The incarnational life modeled by Jesus requires contextualization.

Contextualization in this manner can be defined as the dynamic interplay between gospel and culture, where the gospel interacts in specific contexts within human situations. This interplay and interaction between gospel and culture is necessary for others to comprehend the gospel.¹⁷⁶ Therefore for God’s message “to cross from that context into ours, or from our context to others in evangelistic ministry, there has to be the complex work of contextualization.”¹⁷⁷ To resist contextualization is to risk irrelevance of the gospel, and infidelity to Christ. René Padilla writes:

To contextualize the gospel is to translate it so that the Lordship of Jesus Christ is not an abstract principle or mere doctrine, but the determining factor of life in all its dimensions and the basic criterion in relation to which all the cultural values that form the very substance of human life are evaluated. Without contextualization the gospel will become tangential or even entirely irrelevant.¹⁷⁸

Christ practiced contextualization and so must the church. This does not mean that the gospel message in the process of contextualization needs to become syncretistic but instead must inhabit specific cultural settings. What is clear, though, is the necessity of contextualization, because each person lives within culture and cannot be separated from it.

¹⁷⁵ Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 27.

¹⁷⁶ Missiologically, the cultural barriers between the communication and comprehension of the gospel is termed cultural distance. Some cultures have a greater “cultural distance” and thereby require a greater contextualization of the gospel to result in proper communication and comprehension of the gospel.

¹⁷⁷ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 87.

¹⁷⁸ Padilla, *Mission Between the Times*, 93.

5. Incarnation as Identification

The Incarnation embodies an act of identification. Scot McKnight writes, “God identifies with us in the Incarnation.”¹⁷⁹ God’s identification becomes the model for believers to follow. Jesus took on flesh and became human in an act of mercy and grace. Jesus did not just seem to become human but took on the full nature of humanity in its likeness and form. The Incarnation was then an act of supreme humility and full affinity. Jesus took on all the limitations, the struggles, temptations, and realities of being human (Heb 5:3). Frost and Hirsch write, “to be theologically true to the meaning of the humanity of Jesus, we have to recognize that Jesus was who he was, not only because he was God, because he was formed through his real engagement with his social milieu.”¹⁸⁰ The depth of Jesus’ engagement and identification with humanity was not merely to take on humanness, but to be identified by it and to be adopted fully into humanity. Incarnation then requires identification with others, and full adoption into their lives.

Jesus did not remain removed from humanity but actually entered into history in a specific time and place. The Word of God, then, took on flesh and lived among us (John 1:10-14). He took on all aspects of being human, though without sin, and inhabited and identified fully with humanity. Jesus not only emphasized with the plight of humanity, he entered fully into the plight of humanity, becoming its salvation. This is the depth of Jesus’ identification and incorporation into humanity. Jesus became fully human so that his mission might be accomplished. Jesus did not merely take on some of the forms of humanity and culture but was fully vested into their realities. This is the model Jesus lays down for his followers, to become one with another in order to reach him or her. Frost

¹⁷⁹ McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, 54.

¹⁸⁰ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 36.

and Hirsch write, “incarnational mission will mean that in reaching a people or group we will need to identify with them in all ways possible without compromising the truth of the gospel itself.”¹⁸¹ Incarnation necessitates an inhabitation in another’s worldview, culture, and life. Just as Jesus moved into the neighborhood, so too are believers called to go and move into neighborhoods living among people and truly identifying with them.

Conclusion

The Incarnation of Jesus Christ provides the model for all believers. Believers are to be a sent people, overcoming barriers to reach those in need. Believers are called to follow Jesus in giving up anything that hinders “going.” Incarnational living is therefore primarily living on the move. Incarnational living requires missional movement. An incarnational life also requires a posture of openness, servanthood, and obedience. Incarnational living also requires contextualization with culture and identification with people. Contextualization and identification entails living in close proximity with others. In short, living an incarnational life calls for mission, movement, and closeness as modeled by Jesus. The Incarnation provides a Christological foundation for missional activity, which in turn must shape the actions of the church. Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch comment, “Let’s get our Christology straight and then dare to place all our deeply held desires for how to do church at its service. Not vice versa.”¹⁸² A Christological understanding of the Incarnation must shape the mission and ecclesiology of the church. Those who are “taken captive by Jesus see mission not merely as a practice preferred by God but as an aspect of his very character.”¹⁸³ An incarnational passion for Jesus results

¹⁸¹ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 37.

¹⁸² Frost and Hirsch, *ReJesus*, 12.

¹⁸³ Frost and Hirsch, *ReJesus*, 24.

in a passionate pursuit of mission. Mission flows from God, exemplified by Jesus, and must shape the ecclesiology of the church.

Missional

Mission is crucial to understanding and evaluating the ecclesiology of the emerging church. The following section examines a theology of mission, its biblical basis, the principles it teaches, and its implications for ecclesiology. Missional at its core means sent, and this section describes the “sentness” of God and his people.

A Theology of Mission

Mission is a key concept to correctly grasp. Mission is a foundational reality within the Christian faith. Therefore mission, its foundation, and its implications must be understood. The first key concept that must be understood is the source of mission.

Mission is “derived from the very nature of God. It [is] thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology.”¹⁸⁴ Mission is not simply a subset or derivative of ecclesiology or soteriology. Instead, mission finds its source in the very nature of God. The term *missio Dei* (God’s mission) arose to connote the reality that mission is not an action of the church but an attribute of God.¹⁸⁵ *Missio Dei* specifically refers to “God’s self-revelation as the One who loves the world, God’s involvement in and with the world, the nature and activity of God, which embraces both the church and the world, and in which the church is privileged to participate.”¹⁸⁶ God in his mission is

¹⁸⁴ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390.

¹⁸⁵ Lesslie Newbigin does note that at times the term *missio Dei* has been used inappropriately. He makes these comments concerning the usage of the term, “I am aware that this doctrine of the *missio Dei* has sometimes been used to support concepts of mission which bypass the Church and even bypass the name of Jesus. That is a radical misuse of the concept.” Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 135.

¹⁸⁶ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 10.

actively involved in reconciling in the world unto himself. God's activity flows out of his nature, desires, and purpose. Mission "is the result of God's initiative, rooted in God's purposes to restore and heal creation."¹⁸⁷ The Trinity is therefore missionally active in the world. God the Father through the Son creates the world and is "the agent at work through the Son" (1 Cor 8:6; and 2 Cor 5:18–19).¹⁸⁸ God the Son redeems humanity through his death and resurrection (Eph 1:7). God the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, and sanctifies (John 16:8; and 2 Thess 2:14).¹⁸⁹ The mission of God is not simply an activity of God, but flows from his nature and desire to heal, and be reconciled to the world. Lesslie Newbigin appropriately comments:

It seems to me to be of great importance to insist that mission is not first of all an action of ours. It is an action of God, the Triune God – of God the Father who is ceaselessly at work in all creation and in the hearts and minds of all human beings whether they acknowledge him or not, graciously guiding history toward its true end; of God the Son who has become part of this created history in the Incarnation; and of God the Holy Spirit who is given as a foretaste of the end to empower and teach the Church and to convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment.¹⁹⁰

Newbigin rightly argues that the source of mission is first and foremost a Trinitarian God. Mission "is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God."¹⁹¹ The Triune God has demonstrated his missional nature by the work of the Father in creation, the activity of the Son in his Incarnation and resurrection, and the movement of the Spirit in world. Mission is designed, initiated, and accomplished by God. David Bosch writes, "mission has no life of its own: only in the hands of the sending God can it truly be called mission, not least since the missionary initiative comes

¹⁸⁷ Lois Barret, et al., *Missional Church*, 5.

¹⁸⁸ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 67.

¹⁸⁹ See the examination below in the Biblical Basis section for a further evidence of how the Scriptures demonstrate the missional activity of God.

¹⁹⁰ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 134–135.

¹⁹¹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390.

from God alone.”¹⁹² Mission cannot therefore be separated from the Trinity where it is birthed, and fulfilled. Bosch summarizes, “Mission is, primarily and ultimately, the work of the Triune God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, for the sake of the world, a ministry in which the church is privileged to participate.”¹⁹³

Since God is the source of mission, there are some crucial implications for ecclesiology. Ecclesiology cannot shape missiology. Therefore the church cannot be seen as either the ground or goal of mission. God alone is the ground, actualizer, and initiator of mission. Since God is the source of mission the goal of mission must be the purposes of God. Jürgen Moltmann writes, “The real point is not to spread the church but the kingdom. The goal is not the glorification of the church but the glorification of the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit.”¹⁹⁴ The goal, ground, and agenda of mission are found only in God and not the church. From this point David Bosch writes, “Ecclesiology therefore does not precede missiology.”¹⁹⁵ Bosch rightly argues in his book *Transforming Mission* that Trinitarianism defines mission, which in turn defines ecclesiology.¹⁹⁶ Moltmann writes, “It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and Spirit through the Father that includes the church.”¹⁹⁷ The mission of God in this way envelops the church but is not confined to the church. The church is sent (or called out) into the world as both an instrument and witness to mission. The church then points to God and his mission but cannot claim ownership of the mission. In this way God is the true active agent of mission whereas the

¹⁹² Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390.

¹⁹³ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 392.

¹⁹⁴ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 11.

¹⁹⁵ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 372.

¹⁹⁶ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390.

¹⁹⁷ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 64.

church is at times the locus of the mission.¹⁹⁸ The missional purposes of God shape the church into a missional instrument.¹⁹⁹ The church does not have ownership over the mission of God. For Lesslie Newbigin this reality protects mission from sliding into the dichotomy of social justice and personal salvation. He writes, “Mission is not primarily [the church’s] work – whether of preaching or of social action – but primarily the mighty work of God.”²⁰⁰ Mission must always be connected to the power of God, in which the church is humbly invited to participate. Mission is not simply a burdensome command to the church but central to its nature.²⁰¹ Newbigin comments that to be a part of the Christian body necessitates joining in Jesus’ mission. To be a Christian means to be incorporated into, “the dying of Jesus so as to become a participant in his risen life, and so to share his ongoing mission to the world. It is to be baptized into his mission.”²⁰² Missiology must shape ecclesiology; and to be apart of the church body is to be apart of God’s mission.

The church is then, in its very nature, missional as it is defined by the missional nature of God. Therefore each area of the church has a missional dimension. Even though the nature of the church is missional that does not automatically mean that each activity of the church is missional. Lesslie Newbigin introduced the two terms, intention and dimension, as a way of helpfully clarifying the actualized missional nature of the church.

Newbigin writes:

There is a missionary dimension of everything the Church does. But not everything the Church does has a missionary intention. And unless there is in the

¹⁹⁸ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 119.

¹⁹⁹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 494.

²⁰⁰ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 136.

²⁰¹ Lesslie Newbigin comments that seeing mission as a command, rather than essential to one’s nature and calling, leads to mission being seen as a burden rather than as a joy. Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 116.

²⁰² Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 117.

life of the Church a point of concentration for the missionary intention, the missionary dimension which is proper to the whole life of the Church will be lost.²⁰³

Each aspect of ecclesiological life includes a missional dimension because God and his missional nature define the church. The point for Newbigin is that, while there is a missional dimension to all of ecclesiology, unless the missional dimension is actualized through intention the missional dimension is lost. For Newbigin the point is that passive detachment is not an option. Just because the nature of the church includes a missional dimension does not release it from its obligation for intentional missional action.²⁰⁴ But what must always be central in ecclesiology is that mission belongs to God, and the church is called to partner with God and his mission. Newbigin writes, “It is impossible to stress too strongly that the beginning of mission is not an action of ours, but the presence of a new reality, the presence of the Spirit of God in power.”²⁰⁵ A theology of mission therefore emphasizes that mission begins with God, that missiology and theology define ecclesiology, and lastly that the church is an instrument and product of mission.

Biblical Basis

Theologically mission begins with God. The Scriptures themselves both implicitly and explicitly demonstrate that God’s nature is missional. The following section provides biblical support for the missional nature of God. God at his heart has demonstrated that mission is central. God’s heart and nature are then constitutive for his followers and thereby for the church. God’s missional nature is demonstrated in the very existence of Scripture itself. Charles Taber writes:

²⁰³ Newbigin, *One Body, One Gospel, One World*, 43.

²⁰⁴ Newbigin uses the term “point of concentration” to define when the missional dimension moves to intentional missional action. Newbigin, *One Body, One Gospel, One World*, 43.

²⁰⁵ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 119.

The very existence of the Bible is incontrovertible evidence of the God who refused to forsake his rebellious creation, who refused to give up, who was and is determined to redeem and restore fallen creation for his original design for it. . . . The very existence of such a collection of writings testifies to a God who breaks through to human beings, who disclosed himself to them . . . who takes the initiative in re-establishing broken relationships with us.²⁰⁶

The existence of Scripture itself points to the missional God active in healing, restoring, and initiating relationships with his broken creation. The Scriptures speak of a God who is active in bringing about the healing of all of creation. Furthermore the very texts themselves often came about because of the mission of God. As Christopher Wright says, “The text in itself is a product of mission in action.”²⁰⁷ Therefore the Scriptures themselves are a testament to God’s missional nature.

1. Mission in the Old Testament

The implicit missional nature of God found in the *existence* of the Scripture becomes explicit in the *narrative* of the Scriptures. God’s self-revelation within the biblical narrative demonstrates not only consistently but conclusively that central to God’s plan is a harmonious relationship with humanity. From the initial narrative arc to the concluding promise of Revelation, God is revealed as a God centred on mission.²⁰⁸ The biblical narrative is about God creating the world, its subsequent fall, his work of redemption, and the expectation for the day of the Lord. Humanity, created to enjoy God, is unable to fulfill its creational impulse. The primary focus of the biblical narrative is not the failed attempts of humanity to live up to its original purposes but instead the focus is

²⁰⁶ Taber, “Missiology and the Bible,” 232.

²⁰⁷ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 49.

²⁰⁸ Christopher J. H. Wright notes: “The Bible presents itself to us fundamentally as a narrative, a historical narrative at one level, but a grand level at another. It begins with the God of purpose in creation, moves on to the conflict and problem generated by human rebellion against that purpose, spends most of its narrative journey in the story of God’s redemptive purpose being worked out on the stage of human history, and finishes beyond the horizon of its own history with the eschatological hope of a new creation.” Wright, *The Mission of God*, 64–65.

on the missional God who is consistently, creatively, and restoratively enacting within history to bring the fragments of creation back together.²⁰⁹

The early biblical narrative demonstrates a systemic breakdown of the creational impulse that began ‘in the beginning’ (Gen 3). Adam and Eve, as humanity’s representatives, at both individual and corporate levels fail and falter. They allow the disease of sin to begin to break down the relationship that exists between one another, the planet, and God. As the narrative continues, gaining incendiary momentum, the breakdown of relationships typified in the Garden begins to be seen on a worldwide scale. In essence creation has broken down not only at an individual level but also at a political and cultural level.²¹⁰ What began as a creational-relational breakdown in the Garden has spread to encompass all of human life: political, relational, environmental, cultural, linguistic, and religious life. Humanity cannot fulfill its original purpose to continue in its creational impulse, to enjoy a relationship with God, and the original blessing intended for it. Humanity was created for a relationship with God, with the purpose of reflecting his image (Gen 1:26–27; Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; and 2 Cor 3:18). Yet this purpose is never fully realized on the grand worldwide scale. The Bible paints a picture of a splintered and fractured reality of life that is utterly opposed to the way life is to be lived. It is into this matrix of sin and alienation that God acts to renew and restore his original purpose. Humanity “has failed to fulfill the conditions of the original mandate on a global scale, so Abraham is called to inaugurate a creation in microcosm.”²¹¹ God is on mission to restore and fulfill what was lost in the fall within and through Israel.

²⁰⁹ The biblical story is a theo-focused story. To read the story as the story of humanity is not only anthropocentric but narcissistic. The biblical narrative is God’s story about his nature in action.

²¹⁰ Perriman, *Re:Mission*, 13.

²¹¹ Perriman, *Re:Mission*, 14

God chooses to enter into covenant and begin to work his original missional mandate through Israel. This missional activity begins with the creation of covenants that God makes between himself and others in the Old Testament. These covenants begin with Noah (Gen 9), moving through Abraham (Gen 12; 15; 17), continuing on through Moses (Exod 19), David (2 Sam 7), and Jeremiah (Jer 31). In each of these microcosms of God's intent, God's larger purpose was always the salvation of the world.²¹² Israel was set apart, not for position or privileged status, but to be a light for all nations (Isa 42:6 and 60:1–3), a blessing to others (Gen 18:18)²¹³, and a city on a hill (Isa 2:2–4). God covenanted with the people of Israel to demonstrate to the world that there is one true God. God's "election of Israel as a particular people was for the purpose of bringing the good news about God to all the nations."²¹⁴ God's missional intent is clear throughout his relationship with Israel. God is seeking to mend, restore, and heal the entire world.

The people of Israel were invited to partner in God's mission to become missional in their own right and practice. Yet Israel failed to actualize the mission of God in its midst. Israel fell into idolatry, sin, and disobedience. Even in the midst of Israel's disobedience and waywardness the original creational mandate, or mission of God, remains intact. The primary orientating story of the Old Testament, the Exodus, is about rescue for mission. God "rescued the Hebrews so they could partner with him in his redemptive mission in the world."²¹⁵ Israel was to be "a people in relationship with the creative God, practicing social justice, and prospering in the land."²¹⁶ Yet Israel never

²¹² Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 89.

²¹³ Christopher Wright comments "This one verse binds together *election*, *ethics* and *mission* into a single syntactical and theological sequence located in the will, action, and desire of God. It is fundamentally a missional declaration, explaining election and incorporating ethics." Wright, *The Mission of God*, 368.

²¹⁴ Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 89.

²¹⁵ McNeal, *The Present Future*, 14.

²¹⁶ Perriman, *Re:Mission*, 16.

quite fully grasped that its chosen status was for blessing and redemption of the world, rather than simply enjoying a privileged status. While the purposes of God's mission remained, the actualized reality of God's mission was failing. Israel was meant to set the standard of righteous living under the law demonstrating to the nations surrounding it the fulfillment of God's mission.²¹⁷ Israel fell short of the standard, and therefore must be "justified" (put right), for God's purposes to continue. Yet this justification must come from outside of the law, because "appeal to the law will only ever reinforce the guilty party."²¹⁸

2. Mission in the New Testament

For God's missional activity to be fulfilled, there must come someone who was able to fulfill the law. God's mission required an active missional agent on earth to fulfill the law and point a new way forward. This missional agent is Jesus Christ. Jesus did not come "to found a new religion but to complete the saving work of YHWH, God of Israel, for the sake of Israel and the world – a work that God had been moving purposively forward for centuries."²¹⁹ The purposeful missional activity of God, in choosing Abraham and working through him and his descendants to fulfill his purpose, reaches a climax in the Incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The embedded missionary idea, present within the Old Testament, becomes a full-fledged missionary praxis in the New Testament. Jesus is sent to earth to bring healing, light, and redemption (Luke 4:18; John 8:12; and Eph 1:7). Jesus' missional activity becomes the new lens through which to see the global missional activity of God. Jesus' ministry in continuity with Israel's mission is clear:

²¹⁷ Perriman, *Re: Mission*, 110.

²¹⁸ Perriman, *Re: Mission*, 110.

²¹⁹ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 384.

Jesus' earthly ministry was launched by a movement that aimed at the restoration of Israel. But he himself launched a movement that aimed at the ingathering of the nations to the new messianic people of God. The initial impetus for his ministry was to call Israel back to their God. The subsequent impact of his ministry was a new community that called the nations to faith in the God of Israel.²²⁰

Jesus' mission was both a fulfilling of the mission of God as started in the Old Testament, and a furthering of the mission of God on a global scale.

God's mission to the nations does not supersede his mission to Israel, but is an extension of it. God's now centrifugal mission in the New Testament is also centripetal, drawing people to his central missional act: the redemption of humanity through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This Good News now shapes the missiology of Christianity. Mission can happen on a larger scale than ever before because of Jesus Christ. God in Jesus decisively brings fulfillment to his creational mandate that began in Genesis.²²¹ Now believers, not only as image bearers of God, but primarily as followers of Christ, are also called to partner with God in fulfilling God's mission. Milfred Minatrea writes "those who bear his image are sent to serve his mission . . . in the same way that Christ was sent to accomplish the Father's purpose."²²² God's missional activity, reaching a decisive fulfillment in Jesus Christ, is not yet finished. God's missional activity is still occurring, and believers are to be a part of this mission.

3. Mission for the Church

From the resulting theological exploration of the biblical narrative it is clear that mission is central to the heart of God.²²³ God is concerned about redemption, healing, and

²²⁰ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 506.

²²¹ Jesus' teaching, healing, and forgiving of sins is a "sign that the damage done to the creational microcosm is being repaired, that the period of judgment is coming to an end, that a new life is emerging." Perriman, *Re:Mission*, 55.

²²² Minatrea, *Shaped By God's Heart*, 8.

²²³ The centrality of mission, in God's heart, is not in opposition with God's heart being loving. Instead love and mission are symbiotically joined. Because of God's love for the world, he is active in mission

spreading the Good News of Jesus. If mission is the centre of God's heart it must be the centre of a believer's life as well. The resulting implications of the centrality of mission for the church are clear. The church must be centred on Jesus Christ, and his mission. David Bosch writes, "The church has a history only because God has granted it the privilege of participating in the *missio Dei*."²²⁴ God created "the church as a missional community to join him in his mission of saving the world."²²⁵ God is seeking for the church to proclaim the Lordship of Christ to the entire world, and to participate in the world's healing. The Lordship of Christ encompasses the entire cosmos, and the church is to be a witness to that Lordship. Lesslie Newbigin writes, "The church is the bearer to all the nations of a gospel that announces the kingdom, the reign, and the sovereignty of God. . . . It is not meant to call men and women out of the world into a safe religious enclave but to call them out in order to send them back as agents of God's kingship."²²⁶ The church is to be the agent of kingship for its missional God. The church "was created to be the people of God, to join him in his redemptive mission in the world."²²⁷ Mission is to characterize the church, just as it characterized Jesus' life, and characterized Israel's calling. Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch write:

The glory of God, not the church is the ultimate goal of mission. Our role as the church, however, is a humble participation in his grand scheme . . . we neither determine our own agenda nor merely imitate his but rather participate in the marvelous plan of God according to his call and guidance.²²⁸

The church is neither the initiator nor fulfiller of God's mission, but simply a humble participant in God's mission for his glory. The mission of God must set the ministry of

(John 3:16). As well God's mission, essentially, is loving. See "Mission Based in Love" below for a further elaboration of love and mission.

²²⁴ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 495.

²²⁵ McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 108.

²²⁶ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 20.

²²⁷ McNeal, *The Present Future*, 15.

²²⁸ Frost and Hirsch, *ReJesus*, 28.

the church; the goal cannot be the growth and furthering of the church as such, but only the mission of God.²²⁹

Previously, within a Christendom model, mission was understood as a function of the church. Mission was primarily something the church did.²³⁰ This functional understanding of the nature of the church can no longer hold, as mission within God's nature is not primarily functional. Rather mission must be understood in terms of what the church is, as something related to its nature, just as mission is related to God's nature. The church is neither the starting point nor the goal of mission. David Bosch writes, "God's salvific work precedes both the church and mission. We should not subordinate mission to the church nor the church to mission; both should, rather, be taken up into the *missio Dei*."²³¹ The starting point and goal of mission begins and ends with God. The church "participates in God's mission in the world because it can do no other. It was created for this purpose. This purpose is encoded within the very makeup of the nature of the church."²³² The church must be missional because that is its very nature, or DNA.

The church then must define itself in missional terms first and foremost. While the church must also be defined morally, structurally, communally, and functionally, if it is not centred firmly on Jesus and his mission the result is stagnation rather than momentum. In *Missional Church* the authors comment on true ecclesiology as resulting from a missional understanding:

Missional church is a community of God's people that defines itself, and organizes its life around, its real purpose of being an agent of God's mission to

²²⁹ "Ministry," for the purposes of this paper, relates to the actual praxis of a church, whereas mission refers to the mandate of churches. The ministry of a church is their specific action that seeks to fulfill their God given mandate (mission).

²³⁰ Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 85.

²³¹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 370.

²³² Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 93.

the world. In other words, the church's true and authentic organizing principle is mission. When the church is in mission, it is the true church. The church itself is not only a product of that mission but is obligated and destined to extend it by whatever means possible. The mission of God flows directly through every believer and every community of faith that adheres to Jesus. To obstruct this is to block God's purposes in and through his people.²³³

The church then exists for the mission of announcing, through action, proclamation, and service, to the world that Jesus is Lord.²³⁴ In essence what is known Christologically informs missional activity, which in turn shapes ecclesiology.²³⁵ God's missional activity has been purposively moving throughout history and the church is called to be a decisive part of that mission.

Missional Principles

God is a God of mission. Mission is central to God's heart and nature. From the beginning God has been purposively moving through history. From Adam and Eve, through Abraham and Israel, to Jesus Christ, God has been accomplishing his mission. From the preceding theological and Scriptural discussion key principles can be derived from the narrative of God's actions. These principles will inform the evaluation of the emerging church as to whether or not the emerging church fulfills the missional calling of God that is upon the church.

From the biblical basis above certain key principles can be discerned that will enable a deep examination of the emerging church as to its missional nature. First, mission must direct the ministry and action of the church. Second, mission is based in love and flows out of love. Third, mission requires faithful and committed relationships. Fourth, the natural outworking of mission is multiplication. Fifth, mission must involve

²³³ Barrett, et al., *Missional Church*, 6.

²³⁴ Wright, *Simply Christian*, 204.

²³⁵ Frost and Hirsch, *ReJesus*, 43.

each and every person. These principles are not exhaustive but provide touch points for evaluation of the emerging church's ecclesiology. The principles are purposively general to allow for application and evaluation across the diverse spectrum of practices found within the emerging church.

1. Mission Directs Ministry

God desires for the whole world to be reconciled and the disease of sin to be healed. God's actions have been shaped by this desire, and his intervention into history demonstrates this. God acts so that healing and reconciliation can be found. Primarily the healing mission of God is revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The sending of Jesus was also a sending of new life. God's mission is what instructs and directs the actions of Jesus. Jesus does nothing apart from the Father's will (John 5:19 and 8:28). Jesus' purpose is to accomplish the will of the Father, which is clearly the reconciliation of the world. The model that Jesus demonstrates is a full commitment to the mission of God.

Mission-directed ministry, as demonstrated by Jesus, has major implications for the church. Mission can no longer be a secondary activity for the church. If mission is central to God, it then must be central to the church. Mission must be the organizing reality for a believer's life and for church life as well. Mission must inform, shape, and direct ecclesiology and praxis. God must then also remain the focal point, and initiator of mission. The church cannot assume control and authority over the mission of God. Instead it must intentionally participate in God's mission.²³⁶ Ecclesiology cannot define the forms of mission. Mission defines the forms of ecclesiology. Mission cannot be relegated to an aspect of the church; it must direct all aspects of the church and the

²³⁶ Newbigin, *One Body, One Gospel, One World*, 43.

individuals within the church. Ed Setzer writes, “The church needs to realize that mission is its ‘fundamental identity’.”²³⁷ Fundamental identity means reality-shaping identity. God’s mission must shape the ecclesiology and fundamental outlook of the church in totality. The church cannot shape the mission of God; the mission of God shapes the church.

2. Mission Based in Love

Missional activity is based in the nature of God and therefore all missional activity must reflect God. Therefore mission must demonstrate love because God is love (1 John 4:8). Stanley Grenz writes that “throughout all eternity the divine life – the life of the Father, Son, and Spirit – is best characterized by our word ‘love’. Love, therefore, that is, the reciprocal self-dedication of the Trinitarian members, builds the unity of the one God.”²³⁸ Therefore as love is central in characterizing the divine life of the Trinity it must also characterize Christians, and their activity. Grenz continues writing that the “God of love responds to creation with compassion.”²³⁹ God’s mission is based in love, so those who partner in that mission must also be loving. David Bosch summarizes, “to participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God’s love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love.”²⁴⁰

The missional nature of love is supremely seen in the sending of Jesus Christ to earth. Out of love God sends his Son to the world (John 3:16). Wilbert R. Shenk writes, “Incarnation signifies full identification, but it is incarnation in the service of disclosing

²³⁷ Setzer, “The Missional Nature of the Church and the Future of Southern Baptist Convention Churches,” 73.

²³⁸ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 72.

²³⁹ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 96.

²⁴⁰ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390.

God's love and will for humankind."²⁴¹ God's sending of Jesus is both a revelation of his missional desire and love. Jürgen Moltmann writes that the Incarnation is God's "loving self-communication."²⁴² The church's self-communication, as a revelation and reflection of God, must also be loving. The posture of the church must not be antagonistic to culture and others, but welcoming and grace-filled if it is to accomplish the mission of God.

Mission that is based in anything other than God's passionate and zealous love will ultimately lead towards religiosity. A truly missional movement must have God and his love at the centre. Humanity is meant to live "in bonds of mutual love and obedience that reflect the mutual relatedness in love in the being of the Triune God himself."²⁴³

Therefore mission that is not based on love, and reflecting God's love is missing the point. Mission has been at times co-opted by consumerism, marketing, and a desire to see the size of the church grow larger.²⁴⁴ When mission is enacted outside of the outworking of love, mission ends up becoming inauthentic, and disobedient to the call of God.²⁴⁵ A missional church must be centered on letting God's love dictate the mission. Love must centre and direct the mission of God, and thereby the partnership of the church in God's mission.

3. Mission as Faithful Relationships

God has demonstrated a posture of faithful relationships throughout his interaction with humanity. The faithfulness of God to his committed relationships is

²⁴¹ Shenk, "The Culture of Modernity as a Missionary Challenge," 78.

²⁴² Moltmann, *The Kingdom and the Spirit*, 117.

²⁴³ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 118–119.

²⁴⁴ Carl Raschke writes, "Like ancient Israel's subtle entanglement with the local pagan cults, many evangelical Christians, including many postmodern adherents, have seen the power of the gospel dwindle in their lives and their churches because they have gone whoring after the false gods of spiritual and material consumption." Raschke, *GloboChrist*, 107. For a discussion on how the church has become co-opted by consumerism, size, and marketing see Jethani, *The Divine Commodity*, 67–84.

²⁴⁵ McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, 22.

extolled multiple times in the Old Testament. God is characterized by demonstrating faithful mercy and grace to others (Deut 7:9; 2 Sam 24:14; Ps 117; 136; and Mic 7:18). God is faithful to his people and his promises. The faithfulness of God becomes a defining characteristic in his missional activity in the world. In the Old Testament, God commits to the Israelites over the long-term. In essence God's mission is based upon a long-term faithful commitment. God is not simply faithful from a distance, but faithful within his relationships. God chooses to inhabit, live with, and enter into a covenantal relationship with Israel over the course of her history. God in the Old Testament is faithful in his relationships.

The model demonstrated by God in the Old Testament becomes even more explicit in the New Testament. In the Incarnation Jesus binds himself to humanity. God, through Jesus, commits himself to having a long-term faithful relationship with humanity.²⁴⁶ Both Jesus' coming to earth and his actions on earth reveal a deep commitment to developing faithful relationships. Jesus commits himself to faithful relationships with twelve disciples. Jesus is committed to the disciples' holistic growth, and he is faithful to this commitment. Jesus promises never to leave them alone but to be with them, and to send the Holy Spirit (John 14:18 and 16:7). Jesus is in essence covenanting to a faithful relationship in which he will work in them to accomplish his mission and purpose. God's missional activity, as demonstrated in both the Old and New Testament, clearly entails developing faithful relationships with others.

God's model is to commit to a people over the long-term changing and shaping them by his loving relationship with them. Therefore the church is called to reflect that aspect of God's missional activity. The church must be characterized by faithful

²⁴⁶ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 170.

relationships. The church must enter into relationships committing to being present physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually over the long-term. The church must focus on being faithful to the relationships that it enters into rather than to efficiency and programs. Mission must be sustained by long-term relational realities rather than short-term strategies. One cannot bypass the long-term commitment necessary for such growth through using programs, techniques, or by growing more efficient.²⁴⁷ Such an understanding radically shifts the church's understanding away from efficiency towards relational development.²⁴⁸ Lesslie Newbigin writes, "We grow into true humanity only in relationships of faithfulness and responsibility toward one another."²⁴⁹ Faithful relationships with one another lies at the heart of true humanity as demonstrated by Jesus Christ. A missional understanding of ecclesiology recognizes that committed relationships are key in God's missional activity. Therefore for the church to accurately reflect God in its mission it must enter into faithful relationships with others.

4. Mission as Multiplication

Throughout the Bible multiplication has occurred as a result of God's missional activity. In the beginning God gave humanity the mandate to multiply and fulfill his purpose (Gen 1:28). God's initial mandate was built upon an inherent focus on growth, multiplication, and progression. After the breakdown of the creational microcosm God's missional remedy is through a specific people. God's missional blessing was to flow through the multiplication and growth of the Abrahamic family that resulted in creation

²⁴⁷ Wilbert Shenk comments that in the modern church, "the key problem to be solved was to find the right methods and techniques and to organize a campaign, crusade, or drive. This put a premium on program rather than the formation of a community of disciples." Shenk, *Write the Vision*, 62.

²⁴⁸ Jones, *Postmodern Youth Ministry*, 123–25.

²⁴⁹ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 231.

of the Israelite nation (Gen 12:2–7; and 15:1–7).²⁵⁰ God’s desire is to multiply his representatives throughout the world. In Ezekiel 37:26, God says, “And I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forever.” God’s missional activity in the Old Testament has a clear tie to multiplication, growth, and development.

Within the New Testament the mission is again tied to multiplication. The focus though moves from multiplication of a nation to a Kingdom and the gospel.²⁵¹ The New Testament paints a picture of the Kingdom of God that grows and multiplies (Mark 4:1–32; Luke 8:4–18; and 13:20–21). One parable and teaching worth specific attention is the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:1–23. Here Jesus explains the last portion of this parable by saying, “But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown” (Matt 13:23). Jesus clearly states that when the word is properly received growth, and multiplication follows. Multiplication was clearly seen in the New Testament in the establishment and extension of the early church. The Acts narrative demonstrates the expansive power of God’s missional activity. Acts 1:8 says, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” The mission of God purposely expands from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Acts continues to attest of the multiplication and expansion of God’s mission

²⁵⁰ In fact Abraham’s faith in God to fulfill his promise of multiplication through him is reckoned as faithfulness (Gen 15:6).

²⁵¹ Rather than the blessing being tied to a specific nation, now the blessing of a reconciled relationship with God is available to all. The gospel and the Kingdom are opened up to the world as the proper goal of God’s missional activity (1 Tim 2:4).

as the gospel is preached new believers turn to Christ and faith communities begin (Acts 13:1–4; 14; 16:5; and 19:21). The Acts narrative makes it clear that God was active in multiplying believers, and extending his mission. In fact in the first missionary journey of Paul it is the Holy Spirit that sends Paul and Barnabas out (Acts 13:4), and as a result God’s message multiplied and spread (Acts 13:9).

God is a missionary God, and the mission of God is called to spread. The mission of God cannot be fulfilled unless it is reproduced and multiplied within the lives of God’s followers. Disciples are to create disciples, leaders must create leaders, and churches are to create churches all under the power of the Holy Spirit. The church then is not called simply to maintain but to grow, and multiply. The very nature of the mission in the Old and New Testament gives credence to the fact that mission is meant for multiplication. Neil Cole writes, “The New Covenant, established by Jesus’ own blood spilled as a sacrifice, was to release a decentralized nation of priests who would multiply and fill the earth with his presence.”²⁵² At times growth rather than multiplication has shaped the consciousness of mission in the church.²⁵³ Multiplication as a missional focus, and principle, must recapture the imagination of the church if it is to remain faithful to God.

5. Mission Involving Everyone

Mission must involve each and every Christian. Each Christian is called to reflect Jesus Christ, and become more like him (Rom 8:29; and Eph 4:13–15). The life of Jesus was one lived on mission. Therefore each and every believer has a mission. As Jesus

²⁵² Cole goes on to cite Ezekiel 37:26–28 to work out his statement. Cole, *Organic Church*, 44.

²⁵³ David Fitch comments on the propensity to measure growth rather than multiplication within the local church. He writes, “Let us turn from measuring the size of buildings to the number of new churches planted. Let us count the number of local congregations each church has formed outside itself instead of the attendance figures on Sunday morning or the increased size of the worship facility.” Fitch, *The Great Giveaway*, 37.

says, “As [the Father] sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (John 17:18). Christians are sent people, empowered by the Spirit, to be an instrument of God’s mission. Each Christian has a mission; each church has a missional purpose. Jürgen Moltmann writes, “The whole congregation and every individual in it belong with all their powers and potentialities to the *mission* of God’s kingdom.”²⁵⁴ Belonging to the church, and Christ, means that one belongs to the corresponding mission. Belonging to God’s family necessitates being involved in God’s mission. Jesus in the Great Commission clearly calls his followers to disciple-making and mission. Jesus says:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matt 25:18–20)

Jesus, out of his authority, empowers the disciples to go out and take part in the mission of God. Jesus gives a clear mission to his disciples and his followers: make disciples of all nations. Jesus’ call to make disciples is not intended for just the original twelve disciples but is a call that is definitive for all who would follow Christ. Disciples create disciples. The purpose of Jesus’ followers is to share the Good News and partner with God in his mission. In short, God calls forth each Christian and each believer to be a disciple-making believer on mission for him. Mission must captivate believers’ hearts. God’s mission encompasses and calls each Christian to God and to others. Mike Regele writes:

If the local congregation is the primary unit of mission in the twenty-first century, then the individual members of the local congregation are the primary agents of mission. We have the opportunity to again see the lay person as playing not just a supporting actor role but a lead role in the mission of Christ’s church in the world. The Pauline notion of being ambassadors for Christ takes on renewed meaning, not just for those who enter into “full-time Christian work” but for those who

²⁵⁴ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 10 (emphasis original).

work, period. Each one of us must be captured by the vision of playing this role in every activity we undertake.²⁵⁵

The call to be a missionary of God is upon each and every believer.²⁵⁶ No Christian can be non-participatory in God's mission. God's mission is definitive for Christians. Mission is for everyone.

Conclusion

The aforementioned principles must shape the ecclesiology of the church, because they are reflected in God's activity. God has a missional heart, and his heart must shape our relationship to the world. The principles mentioned above reflect God's missional activity in the world. Examining God's mission, its biblical grounding, and its implications for ecclesiology generates the principles; the principles are therefore useful for evaluating the emerging church.

To be missional requires having the mission of God shape and direct the ministry and action of his people. Missional activity is God-shaped and directed activity. The church's activity must begin with God and his heart rather than tradition and structures. To be missional also necessitates acting out of love. God acts out of love, and because of love.²⁵⁷ Love must therefore also be the centre of the church's engagement, and mission with the world. Love must empower the activity of missional people. To be missional calls and compels believers to have faithful relationships. Relationships must be built over time with faithful presence and love. Relationships must be the focus of missional life. While programs and presentations can be useful, without the foundation of committed relationships one falls short of God's example. Faithful relationships are a

²⁵⁵ Regele, *Death of the Church*, 220.

²⁵⁶ God, through the Holy Spirit, enables and equips each and every believer for his mission, therefore emphasizing the participatory nature of being a Christian (1 Cor 12:4-7).

²⁵⁷ Moltmann, *Kingdom and the Spirit*, 117.

core foundation in a missional life. To be missional requires a multiplication focus.

Growth and addition are important but God's mission is to be shaped by multiplication and reproduction. Disciples are called to generate and produce disciples. Churches are to birth churches. A missional church is a multiplying church. To be missional must involve each an every believer, and church. To be a follower of Christ is to be a partner in God's mission. One cannot be a follower of Christ without participation. There can be no spectator Christians or churches. Instead, the mission of God must captivate and motivate everyone who follows Jesus. These missional and incarnational principles, derived from Scripture and presented in this chapter, provide the basis upon which to engage the ecclesiology of the emerging church.

CHAPTER 3: THE INCARNATIONAL NATURE OF THE EMERGING CHURCH

The emerging church is a positive development within society because its ecclesiology is both incarnational and missional. This chapter explores and evaluates this development through an incarnational matrix, and the aforementioned incarnational principles guide this evaluation. The missional nature of the emerging church is discussed in chapter four. While the incarnational principles, discussed in this chapter are theological, they only gain traction and impact when practiced. Michael Fishbane writes, “accordingly our first task is to think about theology and its concerns, and this is for the sake of living theologically and enacting its truths in the midst of life.”²⁵⁸ Therefore specific examples of the emerging church living out the theological incarnational truths will be given.

Incarnation as Going

The emerging church is incarnational by “going.” Learning from the life of Jesus, these churches focus more on ‘going on mission’ rather than attracting individuals to the church. Since the central heart of God is missional, the emerging church responds by seeing its nature as “sent.” To be able to reach those behind significant cultural barriers requires adopting “a missionary stance in relation to culture. And partly that will mean adopting a *sending* approach rather than an *attractional* one.”²⁵⁹ Reggie McNeal summarizing the heart of many emergents writes, “We need to go to where people are already hanging out and be prepared to have conversations with them about the great love

²⁵⁸ Fishbane, *Sacred Attunement*, 33.

²⁵⁹ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 62.

of our lives.”²⁶⁰ True love is seen in the sending nature of God and the responsive “going” of the church. The incarnational ‘sentness’ of emerging churches is clear in both their understanding and praxis. The following discussion will highlight how emerging churches focus on going incarnationally, in their thought and then in their specific praxis.

First, emerging churches focus on “going” incarnationally rather than being primarily attractational within their thought. Being incarnational for the emerging church requires, “a preparedness to go to the people, not expecting them to come us. As Jesus came from the heavens to humanity, we enter into the ‘tribal’ realities of human society.”²⁶¹ Each and everyone of Jesus’ “followers are sent ones.”²⁶² Incarnationally going is central for each person as part of the emerging church. Rick McKinley comments that a major misstep in modernity was turning “‘go’ and ‘spread’ into complicated programs best left to missionaries and preachers.”²⁶³ The emerging church is rediscovering the essential sent nature of the body of believers. The emerging church’s self-understanding is that it is primarily a sent body, first and foremost. The goal is not to set up a sanctified structure to draw people to, but to go out and be the church in the world. Alan Hirsch comments, “Attractational church demands that in order to hear the gospel, people come to us, on our turf, and in our cultural zone.”²⁶⁴ According to the emerging church this attractational model has distinctly distorted the calling and model of Jesus Christ.²⁶⁵ Non-Christians do not need to come to church to find Christ; the emerging church has decided to intentionally go out to them. Graham Cray, working with

²⁶⁰ McNeal, *The Present Future*, 42.

²⁶¹ Frost, *Exiles*, 55.

²⁶² McKinley, *This Beautiful Mess*, 91.

²⁶³ McKinley, *This Beautiful Mess*, 91–92.

²⁶⁴ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 142.

²⁶⁵ Neil Cole writes, “Non-Christians aren’t fretting, trying to figure out ways to into church. Church is not something they feel they need or want, or are even curious about. So often we erect a difficult barrier to evangelism by expecting people to come to our churches to find Christ.” Cole, *Organic Church*, 179.

emerging churches in England, summarizes their thought by writing, “Start with the church and the mission will probably get lost. Start with mission and it is likely that the Church will be found.”²⁶⁶ Cray has discovered that the centre of the emerging church is a commitment to mission and going to others. Mission as expressed in incarnational going is clearly found within emerging thought and convictions.²⁶⁷

Second, the emerging church actualizes their convictions to “go” within their practice. The emerging church is not focused on creating a sacred space to draw people to, but instead is a body sent on mission to discover the sacred within the world. Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost comment that the emerging church does “not create sanctified space into which unbelievers must come to encounter the gospel. Rather, the missional church disassembles itself and seeps into the cracks and crevices of a society in order to be Christ.”²⁶⁸ This sending/going impulse can be seen very practically in a number of ways within the emerging church. For *Imago Dei*, a church in Portland, going entails encountering difference. Rick McKinley, the founding pastor writes, “‘Going’ implies that we go somewhere new, to someone not like us, to some culture or subculture where we might not feel comfortable or knowledgeable or welcome.”²⁶⁹ Practically this was shown when, Donald Miller, who is a member of *Imago Dei*, and a few friends set up a confessional booth at Reed College during the annual Ren Fayne festival. During this festival students get drunk, high, and often naked. Miller, and others, went to the students

²⁶⁶ Cray, *The Mission Shaped Church*, 116.

²⁶⁷ While incarnationally going is central to the emerging church, gathering together as believers is not to be neglected (Heb 10:25). In emerging churches gathering is not neglected but is framed within the context of mission (Heb 10:24–25). Gathering happens as an outworking of mission rather than as a cause of mission. Hugh Halter and Matt Smay comment that without clear missional activity and focus gathering together as believers can easily slide into consumeristic individualism. See Halter and Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom*, 150.

²⁶⁸ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 12.

²⁶⁹ McKinley, *This Beautiful Mess*, 94.

partying through the festival not to *receive* confessions, but instead to *confess* to them the ways in which they personally have fallen short of God's standard. Miller and his friends stepped out of their comfort zones to reach those who were different by beginning to build bridges by asking for their forgiveness.²⁷⁰ For *Imago Dei*, and many other emerging churches, the notion of going entails going beyond one's comfort zone to reach others. McKinley continues saying, "All people matter to God, but at *Imago* we continue to see that the people in the margins are the first ones we should go to. Christ went to those whom the comfortable and powerful had rejected."²⁷¹ For their community the incarnational principle of "going" is actualized in reaching out to the margins, to those who are different, and to those who are neglected.²⁷²

Another example of actualized incarnational going is *Third Place Communities* (TPC) in Australia. TPC as an emerging church seeks to go and build church in the midst of others. Rather than seeking to meet people and attract them to church, TPC "attempts to build church around people where they are."²⁷³ The point for those involved in TPC is to turn "third places" into places of missional and incarnational engagement.²⁷⁴ Whether the "third place" is a pub, café, hobby centre, or sports clubs, church takes place wherever members of TPC are. "*Smallboatbigsea*," the missional emerging church to which Michael Frost belongs, is similar to TPC in their desire to incarnationally go to others. Going is central and core to their self-understanding and action. BELLS

²⁷⁰ For the full story see Miller, *Blue Like Jazz*, 116–28.

²⁷¹ Miller, *Blue Like Jazz*, 99.

²⁷² Stuart Murray notes that this change within the emerging church is a significant change. The Christendom model meant that the church moved from the margins of society to the centre. This move can be seen even in the geographic placement of churches within towns as they moved from the outskirts to the centre. The emerging church, being post-Christendom, is regaining its posture and proximity to those in the margins and urban cores. See Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 76–78.

²⁷³ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 146.

²⁷⁴ One's "first place" is the home, the "second place" is work, and a "third place" is where one spends time and receives meaning outside of the "first" and "second" place.

summarizes *smallboatbigsea*'s rule of life: bless, eat, listen, learn, and sent. Being sent and going to others is a core value of this church. Michael Frost explains the "sent" core value:

At smallboatbigsea we are committed to looking out for ways in which our daily lives can be expression of our 'sent-ness', our mission as agents of God's grace on this planet. This will include acts of hospitality and the just stewardship of our resources, as well as working for justice and striving for global peace.²⁷⁵

The incarnation calls believers into the world. The emerging church responds in both thought and practice. Andrew Jones summarizes, "Our mission is what gives us purpose . . . our mission defines us more than our worship."²⁷⁶ Mission in this context is going to others with the salvific message of the gospel. The church does not sit back and invite Jesus to take part in what the church is doing. Instead the emerging church actively chases after what Jesus is doing, and going where he leads. In short, the emerging church is committed in both thought and action to incarnationally going to people as a result of their incarnational and missional understanding of Jesus Christ.

Incarnation as Posture

The emerging church demonstrates an incarnational posture through its openness, servanthood, and obedience. These three characteristics mark the posture and nature of Christ's ministry here on earth. This incarnational posture is particularly relevant to a postmodern context. These three characteristics highlight and demonstrate that the emerging church, as an ecclesiological and theological movement, exemplifies an

²⁷⁵ Frost, *Exiles*, 151.

²⁷⁶ Andrew Jones is quoted in Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 58. In this quote Andrew Jones is not disparaging worship but instead is reflecting that for his church *Boaz* the mission rather than *worship style* is defining. Worship is important within the emerging church. N. T. Wright a key theologian used by the emerging church writes that renewed worship of God leads to a renewed mission for God. N. T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope*, 264.

incarnational posture modeled by Jesus Christ. The three characteristics are further examined below.²⁷⁷

Openness: The Position of the Emerging Church

The emerging church intentionally adopts a posture of openness. The emerging church seeks to become open both to God and to others. It demonstrates the incarnational posture of openness of Jesus in two key ways. First, it operates with a position of openness regarding membership. Second, the emerging church has an open epistemology.

The membership structure of the emerging church reflects Jesus' incarnational open posture. Often within a traditional evangelical church membership in the community was distinguished by a formal event or process that differentiates members from non-members.²⁷⁸ Within a traditional setting there are certain boundary-keepers, whether they be theological, social, ethical, etc., that become the first obstacle to entering the community.²⁷⁹ From the perspective of the emerging church, traditional membership does not resemble the open and engaging posture of Jesus. Andrew Perriman writes the, "Emerging church is more willing to be inclusive . . . less concerned with defining and safeguarding the boundaries of membership, than 'modern' forms of evangelicalism."²⁸⁰ Frost and Hirsch comment, saying that a modern church "is a bounded set . . . it is a set of people clearly marked of from those who do not belong to it."²⁸¹ Rather than focusing on boundaries, the emerging church pursues a centered-set membership structure that is both

²⁷⁷ The three characteristics that are examined below are not unique to the emerging church. In fact each healthy church should demonstrate openness, servanthood, and obedience. This section seeks to examine whether or not the emerging church appropriately and concretely demonstrates these three characteristics.

²⁷⁸ A good example of this is Rick Warren's Saddleback church where members take class 101–104 to become members. Rick Warren, "B.E.L.O.N.G.," no pages.

²⁷⁹ For examples of boundaries becoming obstacles to seekers see McNeal, *The Present Future*, 39, 50, and 66.

²⁸⁰ Perriman, *Otherways*, 11.

²⁸¹ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 47.

open and inclusive. Hirsch and Frost describe centre-set membership as follows: “Rather than drawing a border to determine who belongs and who doesn’t, a centered set is defined by its core values, and people are not seen as in or out, but as closer or further away from the centre.”²⁸² Membership that is centred-set focuses on the centre: Jesus Christ. Membership is therefore constituted by a continual pursuit of Jesus Christ.

The result from a centered-set membership structure is an incarnational posture of openness and inclusivity to all people. Jesus’ posture allows for people to come to him from any place, and any angle. The centered set membership of the emerging church reflects Jesus’ posture by allowing anyone to join in the mutual pursuit of Jesus from any place or angle. In essence, what defines someone is no longer a program but a posture; it is no longer a boundary but a movement. Jesus in his mission “was less interested in where [people had] come from than in where they were heading.”²⁸³ Emerging churches are creating new organic ways to envision membership, and community connection that reflect the incarnational open posture of Jesus. For the emerging church the trajectory of an individual’s journey is the determining factor in membership. The point is whether or not, an individual is moving towards Christ, thereby growing in terms of Christlike behavior, and belief. Having the direction of one’s journey constitute membership allows for anyone to join in, participate, and engage Jesus and the church. The posture of the emerging church is then open and inclusive, allowing anyone to enter and engage in it if they so choose.

The epistemology of the emerging church also reflects the incarnational open posture of Jesus Christ. These churches are open to growing in knowledge and

²⁸² Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 47.

²⁸³ Pagitt, *A Christianity Worth Believing*, 157.

understanding from many different perspectives. Christ opened himself up to becoming human and thereby was shaped by humanity. Therefore the emerging church opens itself up to others, to learn and being shaped by them. Becoming Christlike is the goal of the journey for the emerging church. The destination is definitive but the route there is dynamic for the emerging church. Therefore, while each person is journeying towards Christ, the route taken can drastically differ between people and communities. This approach simultaneously allows for both the certainty of the destination, and for openness to many specific courses towards the Christlike goal.²⁸⁴ In short, the beliefs of the emerging church are not rarified for dissection, but held openly as directions for the journey towards Christ. Therefore, “God is not a theoretical problem to be solved, but a mystery to be participated in.”²⁸⁵ The emerging church is then open to God, to being changed by God, and to his presence. The Word “is never directly grasped as a source of knowledge, but rather is encountered as a life-changing event.”²⁸⁶ The Gospel can never be fully comprehended in its totality, and for that reason the emerging church is open in its posture to growing in knowledge and understanding from others and from God.

While there is confidence within the emerging church’s beliefs, the confidence does not lead to assumptions of complete comprehension. Brian McLaren writes that too often Christians, “showed boldness and confidence in the gospel through what appeared to outsiders . . . as bombast, arrogance, disrespect, and insensitivity.”²⁸⁷ Instead, confidence in the Scriptures leads to a desire to openly encounter God more fully, and let him transform one’s knowledge and understanding. The posture of the emerging church

²⁸⁴ Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 5–6.

²⁸⁵ Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 22.

²⁸⁶ Rollins, *The Fidelity of Betrayal*, 58.

²⁸⁷ McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 258.

is open to new growth in knowledge, not because of lack of confidence in what is known, but due to a God who overflows the boundaries of language, experience, and understanding. Knowledge within the emerging church is always held, then, with an open posture, as it is never full but always growing. Knowledge and truth become incarnational, for they are to be engaged, rather than seized and annexed. Reason alone cannot explain the gospel; the gospel must be encountered in a holistic fashion.²⁸⁸ Tony Jones writes, “Emergents believe that awareness of our relative position – to God, to one another, and to history – breeds biblical humility, not relativistic apathy.”²⁸⁹ The point for the emerging church is not relativism but openness to new experiences and growth. Questions and doubts are not forbidden, but accepted and encouraged.²⁹⁰ In short, the emerging church is characterized by a posture of openness to being shaped by the other and by God in terms of its knowledge and beliefs.²⁹¹ The posture of the emerging church is open and humble following an incarnational model of Jesus Christ.

Servanthood: The Practice of the Emerging Church

Servanthood is a primary posture of the Incarnation and of the emerging church. Jesus demonstrated his servant’s heart throughout his ministry. The emerging church seeks to follow Jesus in his incarnational example by serving with generosity. Serving is not simply something to be done, but it is a cornerstone of life for the emerging church.

²⁸⁸ Rollins writes, “If the truth affirmed by Christianity lay in something that people could intellectually grasp, then the truth of faith would be something that one could hold without ever hearing or following its demand.” Rollins, *The Fidelity of Betrayal*, 139.

²⁸⁹ Jones, *The New Christians*, 115.

²⁹⁰ “Only a genuine faith can embrace doubt, for such a faith does not act because of a self-interested reason . . . but acts simply because it must.” Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 34.

²⁹¹ For examples of the openness of the emerging church in action, specifically in encountering others see the section below entitled “Close Proximity in Emerging Praxis” and the work of the ikon evangelism project.

The incarnational posture of servanthood can be seen in both the thought and practice of the emerging church. It practices faith within a consumeristic society; this leads to a greater necessity of servanthood than ever before. Brad Cecil of Axxess says:

We have made Jesus out to be the ultimate consumer commodity. He is packaged in a convenient needs-driven format of the one-hour God experience that happens every Sunday morning. We are trying to flip this and prioritize the community and work to make the culture a place in which the King reigns. Social service and activism are how we do this.²⁹²

For Cecil, servanthood is the necessary counter-cultural method to move away from consuming Christ to being transformed by Christ. The incarnational posture of servanthood leads to seeing the Kingdom grow. A servant attitude is central as Christians seek to be post-consumeristic.²⁹³ To be incarnational, and to challenge consumerism, servanthood must become a characteristic posture of Christianity. The emerging church seeks to make service central to all areas of life through hospitality. Hospitality, as part of the incarnational posture of Christ, is “manifested in emerging churches as members seek to serve those both inside and outside their communities in all spheres of life.”²⁹⁴

For emergents, servanthood cannot simply happen within one area of life. Servanthood needs to encompass all areas of life as evidenced by a hospitable spirit. At *Quest* in Seattle, every fifth Sunday is dedicated to service. The service may be picking up trash, painting a playground, or working at a food shelter.²⁹⁵ Without that incarnational posture of servanthood the emerging church would be inauthentic. Simon Hall of *Revive* says, “Our gospel would be toothless and hypocritical if we were not

²⁹² Brad Cecil is quoted in Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 139.

²⁹³ Bolger and Gibbs write, “Emerging churches find the culture in which they live to be a challenge as a marketing orientation permeates all spheres of society . . . Emerging churches stand out significantly as they reject the economic rules prevalent in culture and practice hospitality by serving with generosity.” Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 136.

²⁹⁴ Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 135.

²⁹⁵ Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 142.

serving our local community . . . we have a team of people cleaning the local park and streets, some guys do prison visitation, others work with drug addicts and prostitutes.”²⁹⁶

The point for *Revive* is that the gospel necessitates a posture of service that emerging churches seek to reflect. Whether serving is on a large or small scale, within the church or out in the community, the emerging church is oriented towards Jesus’ incarnational posture of servanthood.²⁹⁷

Obedience: The Orientation of the Emerging Church

The emerging church practices an orientation of obedience that flows from Jesus’ incarnational model. Jesus in his posture to God demonstrated supreme and undying obedience. What the Father willed, Jesus did. The posture of Jesus was one of obedience. The emerging church also seeks to walk in a posture of incarnational obedience.

The emerging church demonstrates obedience in a number of ways. First, it has structured its ecclesiology missionally. Rick McKinley writes, “The idea of being sent isn’t an agenda cooked up by some religious organization. It is the heartbeat of the living God. He is a God who sends and who goes himself.”²⁹⁸ The heartbeat of mission is found within the emerging church. For example, Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, in their community *Adullam*, have structured their entire church around mission and incarnation.²⁹⁹ For example when their book *A Tangible Kingdom* was released the church grew substantially simply by having consumer Christians looking for a trendy new church.³⁰⁰ The sudden influx of people, who held a consumer mentality, threatened

²⁹⁶ Simon Hall quoted in Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 143.

²⁹⁷ “[Emerging churches] look to serve others as part of a holistic way of life.” Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 144.

²⁹⁸ McKinley, *This Beautiful Mess*, 93.

²⁹⁹ Halter and Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom Primer*, 2.1.

³⁰⁰ Hugh Halter, “A Day with Hugh Halter.”

to sway the missional values of *Adullam*. Therefore in order to ensure that the ministry remained missional, rather than consumeristic, the leadership took the decisive step of moving to having a Sunday service every other week rather than weekly. First, this step challenged those in the congregation who joined because the church was cool and hip, to reconsider, and either join in missionally or find another church that was more suited to their needs.³⁰¹ Second, with a Sunday now free, the congregation was encouraged and catalyzed to be missionally involved in their neighborhoods through throwing parties, getting to know neighbors, and serving those within their community.³⁰² Mission shapes Adullam's ministry. The mission of God drives and shapes the ecclesiology of the emerging church. It is obedient in its calling as a missional body.

The emerging church is obedient by recognizing its call to serve the poor and to seek justice. Leaders such as Shane Claiborne, Brian McLaren, and Rob Bell champion justice out of an obedient heart to God.³⁰³ Claiborne and his community routinely make their own clothing, grow their own food, and refuse to take part in the empire of big business and capitalism that subjugates the poor.³⁰⁴ McLaren is pushing leaders to recognize and desist from taking part in the "suicide machine" of consumerism and greed that neglects the poor and forgets justice.³⁰⁵ Bell, within his community, partners with those who are poor, providing advocacy, creative dreaming, and dynamic solutions.³⁰⁶

³⁰¹ To facilitate this change Hugh Halter would often have a "death talk" with individuals. This "death talk" is where he would emphasize the need to die to self, and live for others missionally. Hugh Halter, "A Day with Hugh Halter."

³⁰² "Service" for Adullam specifically means serving someone that is connected to either yourself or another person you know. Service does not mean serving anonymously but in the context of incarnational relationships. Hugh Halter, "A Day with Hugh Halter."

³⁰³ The ways in which the emerging church is active with the poor and seek justice will be further elaborated in the section entitled "Mission Directing Ministry" in Chapter 4.

³⁰⁴ See Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution*, 179–80, and Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*, 258.

³⁰⁵ See McLaren, *Everything Must Change*, 43–72.

³⁰⁶ See Mars Hill church's website <http://www.marshill.org/serving/>.

These three leaders are characteristic of the emerging church and its focus on seeking to obediently follow God in his care and provision for the poor and needy in the world.

The emerging church is characterized by an incarnational orientation of obedience that is practiced within a postmodern context. While it is certainly not perfect, there is a clear desire to be obedient to God in all ways possible. This posture of obedience demonstrates its incarnational posture.

Conclusion

The emerging church demonstrates a clear incarnational posture of openness, servanthood, and obedience. While this posture is surely not unique to the emerging church, it does distinctly demonstrate openness, servanthood, and obedience in a postmodern context.³⁰⁷ The emerging church in its desire to follow Jesus has adopted his incarnational posture. Its open to others as clearly demonstrated in its membership structures. The emerging church is also incarnationally open to being shaped by other's beliefs and thoughts (as well as by God and the Scriptures). Along with being open, the emerging church also displays a servant attitude in both its thought and action. Lastly, it demonstrates an incarnational posture by being obedient, allowing the mission of God to shape its ecclesiology, and by serving the poor. Therefore the emerging church is characterized by an incarnational posture founded and modeled by Jesus Christ.

³⁰⁷ The emerging church is not offering an ecclesiology that excludes the reality of other healthy ecclesiological forms or expressions. Instead the emerging church is seeking to offer one ecclesiological response to the current contemporary culture. Miroslav Volf writes that a multiplicity of models is not only healthy but also desirable. He writes, "I consider the plurality of [ecclesiological] models to be not only legitimate, but indeed desirable. The differentiation of various Christian traditions is not simply to be lamented as a scandal, but rather welcomed as a sign of the vitality of the Christian faith within multicultural, rapidly changing societies demanding diversification and flexibility." Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 21.

Incarnation as Close Proximity

The Incarnation necessitates having a close proximity to people. Incarnational ministry requires getting up close and personal with others. Jesus demonstrates this propensity to overcome barriers, engage people, and live life near others. The emerging church in both theology and ecclesiology demonstrates an incarnational understanding that flows out of Jesus' model. The emerging church practices living in communion, and in deep relationships, as demonstrated by Jesus. That the emerging church practices a close proximity incarnational ministry can be demonstrated both in their thought and actions.

Close Proximity in Emerging Thought

The emerging church, in its thought, emphasizes the necessity of close proximity that is tied to the Incarnation. The necessity for close proximity, as incarnational witness, is especially seen in its understanding of love and evangelism. In *Missional Church*, the authors write, "the missional church works in the world to show God's love and compassion to others outside the church. God's love is too great to be kept only within the church; it has to be shared."³⁰⁸ The emerging church realizes that God's call propels an incarnational witness of sharing God's love. Love for the emerging church gets close to others and enters into the joy, suffering, and life of the "other." Jim Belcher encourages the same as the authors of *Missional Church*, writing, "The church as organism means Christians are called not to hide behind the walls of their distinct community but to take their new hearts, minds, and perspectives into the surrounding communities as salt and light."³⁰⁹ Life, to be incarnational, cannot be sanitized, protected,

³⁰⁸ Lois Barrett, et al., *Missional Church*, 135.

³⁰⁹ Belcher, *Deep Church*, 192.

and isolated. Instead an incarnational life becomes messy as it enters into the dynamic fluidity of human relationships. Michael Frost explains, “If we take the Incarnation seriously, we must take seriously the call to live incarnationally – right up close, near to those whom God desires to redeem. We cannot demonstrate Christlikeness at a distance from those who we feel called to serve.”³¹⁰ An incarnational life requires moving beyond the safe boundaries of one’s existence and entering into relationships characterized by closeness.

Incarnational living, as exhibited through close relationships, is key within the emerging church, even if getting close to another person or persons requires “getting dirty.” Living in close proximity is not a sterile experiment but ‘a beautiful mess’.³¹¹ Kester Brewin writes, “the [emerging church] will be a place that has reevaluated its relationship with dirt and moved on from a sterilized background to appreciate the reality that dirt and dust were everywhere around Christ.”³¹² Using the metaphor of dirt and dust Brewin contends that the emerging church will get dirty by being in close proximity to people just as Jesus was. Boundaries such as dirt and dust will not stop the emerging church from entering into close relationships with others. Sanitary and sterile experiences are the result of a non-incarnational life. For the emerging church overcoming barriers, symbolized by dirt and dust, is the natural outworking of a truly incarnational life.

³¹⁰ Frost, *Exiles*, 55.

³¹¹ The theme of “messiness” as beauty and necessary for engagement is the central theme of McKinley, *This Beautiful Mess*.

³¹² Brewin, *Signs of Emergence*, 166. Brewin wisely commenting on the necessity of dirt for the emerging church writes, “If Christ’s power lies in being able to cleanse, then a church where no dirt is allowed in is powerless.” Brewin, *Signs of Emergence*, 172.

Close Proximity in Emerging Praxis

The emerging church engages in close proximity incarnational praxis. Close proximity praxis results in the emerging church becoming active in neutral third spaces. It seeks to meet people in natural places. Michael Frost summarizes the action taken by those in the emerging church to live incarnationally in close proximity. He states, “Missional proximity can best be developed in bars, pubs, gyms, grocery stores, beauty parlors, community groups, and coffee shops.”³¹³ It is in the natural third places of proximity that the emerging church is incarnationally working. For example *Hot Dogma*, a New York City style hot dog restaurant in Philadelphia, is a business created for the purpose of generating close missional relationships.³¹⁴ It is connected to *Three Nails*, an emerging church, and is full of a welcoming ambiance that generates friendships and close relationships. *Hot Dogma* is a simple example of an intentional third place that was started precisely to allow the emerging church to enter into close proximity relationships.³¹⁵ Michael Frost states that the key to developing close proximity relationships is frequency and spontaneity. Therefore, within the emerging church there is an intention to actively seek to create time and space to frequent third spaces to generate missional close proximity.³¹⁶

Another area that the emerging church demonstrates its incarnational praxis of close proximity is evangelism. An incarnational understanding of “close proximity” has changed the nature of evangelism. Evangelism necessitates close relationships. If the

³¹³ Frost, *Exiles*, 61.

³¹⁴ Frost, *Exiles*, 61.

³¹⁵ Michel Frost discusses other emerging church missional spaces that are created for close proximity. These include such projects as *Zoe’s* music venue and drive through restaurants, the *Donkey Café* that is focused on creating intentional space for students, and *Mars Hill Café* where conversations are intentionally started through the actual café venue itself. Frost, *Exiles*, 61.

³¹⁶ See Kimball, *They Like Jesus But Not the Church*, 36–49; and Frost, *Exiles*, 62–63.

heart of Christianity is relational, then evangelism too must be relational. True evangelism requires relationships that are close and open, whereas within modernity evangelism often consisted of tracts, or presentation methods that kept distance between the believers and the non-believer.³¹⁷ Therefore, in the emerging church “people come to faith after first belonging.”³¹⁸ Belief happens after a relationship and belonging have been initiated and requires close proximity. Carl Raschke writes:

In short, the mystery of the Incarnation is constantly unfurling in the body of believers who affirm the message of the gospel, which is not a verbal content so much as it is the embodiment of love in active relationship, of ‘being Jesus,’ to others. Becoming a missional community has little to do with church outreach beyond one’s neighborhood, or national borders. It has everything to do with shattering walls and barriers between people, even barriers put up by the oftenfulsome chatter of evangelism.³¹⁹

Raschke, characterizing the viewpoint of the emerging church, clearly demonstrates the relational bent of evangelism, highlighting the necessity for close relationships. The gospel, as Raschke reminds us, is not primarily verbal but relational. Therefore to share the gospel must mean entering into relationships with others and sharing life with them. Evangelism is clearly about shattering the barriers to relationship. For *ikon*, an emerging church in Belfast, crossing barriers practically means resisting the twin temptations to either colonize or ostracize an individual.³²⁰ Instead, evangelism means to actively engage those who are different, listening to them in close proximity relationships. For *ikon* this engagement has resulted in the “evangelism project.” The “evangelism project”

³¹⁷ For example see the four spiritual laws, the Roman Road diagrams, Steps to Peace with God or numerous tracts outlining the need to begin a relationship with Jesus without the *necessity* of relationship with the “evangelist.” See Brian McLaren, “Missing the Point: Truth,” 263–64.

³¹⁸ Belcher, *Deep Church*, 94.

³¹⁹ Raschke, *GloboChrist*, 64.

³²⁰ *Ikon's* website states: “The first is a desire to transform that stranger into our own image, endeavoring to eclipse and replace their cultural and religious practices with our own. The second is to exclude and reject the stranger entirely, viewing them as a threat which must be guarded against. In one the stranger is rendered into a clone while in the other they are made into an enemy.” *ikon*, “Evangelism Project,” no pages.

is where a group of individuals, “actively seek to be evangelized, recognizing the deep insight that others can be as an instrument of our further conversion.”³²¹ Therefore those involved with the “evangelism project” go into diverse contexts to encounter those who are different.³²² The point, for those involved, is to cross barriers, to listen, to learn, and to enter into close proximity relationships with those are different. In this instance *ikon* reflects the work of Lesslie Newbigin, a popular author among emerging churches.

Newbigin writes:

Obedient witness to Christ means that whenever we come with another person (Christian or not) into the presence of the cross, we are prepared to receive judgment and correction, to find that our Christianity hides within its appearance of obedience the reality of disobedience. Each meeting with a non-Christian partner in dialogue therefore puts my own Christianity at risk.³²³

The point for both Newbigin and *ikon* is that close proximity relationships are not only the vessel for evangelism but actually have a dual purpose of refining one’s own faith. Lesslie Newbigin demonstrates that the classic biblical example of this is found in the meeting of Peter with the Gentile Cornelius at Caesarea (Acts 10).³²⁴ Here not only is the Gospel shared as Peter crosses social boundaries entering into a close proximity relationship with Cornelius, but Peter was also changed. For the emerging church crossing barriers, entering into close proximity relationships, is not only crucial for Gospel but for preserving and deepening one’s own faith. For *ikon* and the emerging church close relationships, and living in close proximity with others, is the foundation for evangelism and sharing the gospel.

³²¹ *ikon*, “Evangelism Project,” no pages.

³²² The “evangelism project” have gone to the following places to enter into close proximity relationships for mutual growth: a Maharaji, a Hindu Temple, a Church of Scientology, a Jewish Synagogue, a Baha’i Centre, a Zen Buddhist Community, a Russian Orthodox Church, a Quaker Community, a Free Presbyterian Church, a Islamic Society, and a Hare Krishna Centre. *ikon*, “Evangelism Project,” no pages.

³²³ Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 182.

³²⁴ Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 182.

Not only has the incarnational principle of close proximity shaped activity in third places, and evangelism but also in church structures. The emerging church very intentionally seeks to create a church without walls so as to encourage close proximity relationships. The boundaries between church and culture are semi-permeable in the emerging church. The church seeks to seep into all areas of culture and become close to both culture and people. Rather than pulling out of culture, the emerging church enters into the flux of culture with the purpose of developing deep relationships. The conviction of close incarnational relationships has led the emerging church to have “permeable boundaries allowing people to come in and also remind us to be continually engaged with the fullness of a world that is not primarily Christian.”³²⁵

Having permeable boundaries looks different in each contextual envisioning of the emerging church, but some examples are *ikon*, Spencer Burke’s church, Shaun Tunstall’s boating community, and Dan Kimball’s work space. At *ikon* the desire to enter into close relationships with others in a semi-permeable structure has resulted in the church meeting in a bar.³²⁶ In essence, *ikon* sought to meet in a place that was a part of culture, and generated relationships by simply being in close connection to others. Spencer Burke’s church often has moved the “church” out of the building so as to enter into close relationships with others in the community.³²⁷ This decision has resulted in deep and close connections with the homeless and many others, as their “borders” have become permeable, allowing for close proximity and deep relationships.³²⁸ For Burke the

³²⁵ Sawyer, “What Would Huckleberry Do?,” 49.

³²⁶ Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 79.

³²⁷ Burke mentions going to art galleries and eating in parks in Burke and Taylor, *A Heretic’s Guide to Eternity*, 214

³²⁸ Spencer Burke speaking of the people that his church meets as they throw parties in the park writes, “No matter who they are, where they’ve been, or where they’re going tomorrow, the act of sitting on a bench in

action of eating with another person can be replicated, but it is the intent that changes the moment. One lady responded to Burke's close proximity by saying, "other people come to serve us lunch, but you come and have lunch with us."³²⁹ The intent to enter into close relational proximity changes the action. The intent to enter into close relational proximity also drives Shaun Tunstall and his missional community on the Pine River in Brisbane. On the river, Tunstall and his friends pray together, take communion together, serve the poor, tow broken boats back, and are "the chaplains to the general river community."³³⁰ Tunstall's whole community is semi-permeable, because it is out in the open, intentionally organic, inclusive, and engaging. Tunstall and his friends have a structure that not only encourages close relationships but also expects it. Dan Kimball is similar with his work habits. Kimball intentionally works away from the office in coffee shops to encounter others, and lives in close proximity with non-Christians.³³¹ The very structure of Kimball's office habits is incarnational. In summary, the emerging church demonstrates the incarnational value of close proximity in both thought and action.

Incarnation as Contextualization

The emerging church contextualizes its engagement with society, following the model of Jesus' Incarnation. Jesus entered into humanity and became a "contextualized" revelation of God. The Incarnation demonstrates the necessity for contextualization. Michael Frost writes that the Incarnation entails "an employment of language and thought forms of those whom we seek to share Jesus with. After all, he used common speech and

a public park and sharing a bucket of chicken is, in and of itself, enough. Simply being with each other is a sacred moment". Burke and Taylor, *A Heretic's Guide to Eternity*, 210.

³²⁹ Burke and Taylor, *A Heretic's Guide to Eternity*, 210.

³³⁰ Frost, *Exiles*, 132.

³³¹ Kimball, *They Like Jesus But Not the Church*, 36–49.

stories: salt, light, fruit, birds, and the like.”³³² The emerging church has responded by contextualizing its ministry in both thought and practice. Within its thought the emerging church is contextual both in terms of its understanding of mission and theology. Within its practice the emerging church is contextual in its worship space, preaching, and presentation.

First, the emerging church is contextual in its understanding of mission. Reggie McNeal provocatively writes, “Only people without a missiology disdain attempts at being culturally relevant.”³³³ The emerging church with a strong missiological understanding believes in the necessity to be relevant and contextualize to a culture situated within a specific time and place. Yet relevance is not the guiding focus for contextualization, but the mission of God is. The point is that “relevance is a consequence of kingdom living, not a cause.”³³⁴ Relevance, or contextualization, is not a catalytic cause but the consequence of understanding that God’s mission occurs in contextualized ways. The mission of God occurs within culture but is not defined by culture. The mission of God must be the only motivator for contextualization, not a need or a desire to be hip, emerging, cool, or even relevant.³³⁵ Therefore, for the emerging church the incarnational mission of God must be contextualized to the culture, without allowing the agenda to be set by culture. The emerging church is then characterized by an open orientation towards culture, recognizing that the mission of God must be actualized within culture, in contextualized ways. Kester Brewin writes, “the Emergent Church will

³³² Frost, *Exiles*, 55.

³³³ McNeal, *The Present Future*, 51.

³³⁴ McKinley, *This Beautiful Mess*, 95.

³³⁵ McKinley quips, “A lot of people say that the church isn’t reaching America because she’s not relevant . . . We try so hard to be cool. We say we need to have relevant music, relevant programs, relevant parking.” For McKinley true relevance does not come from being “cool” but by being authentic and relational. McKinley, *This Beautiful Mess*, 94–95.

be characterized by an ‘open’ rather than a ‘closed’ system approach – it will be open to the environment; sensing it, responding to it, and, in turn, shaping it.”³³⁶ The emerging church is open to culture so as to *missionally* enter culture, just as Jesus did, shaping and transforming it. Jesus’ incarnational ministry becomes a defining model for contextualization as he entered into the culture, language, and history of a situated people to reach them. The emerging church follows suit by being “an open place, fully engaging with the environment that is hosting it; sensing it, responding to it, learning from it, always seeking to change and evolve and renew itself.”³³⁷ For the emerging church mission must engage culture and thereby contextualize towards culture. Therefore, the Incarnation not only encourages contextualized thought in relation to mission, but also demands it.

Second, the emerging church is contextual in its theology as well. Just as the mission of God is contextualized in a given historical context, so too is theology embedded in a historical-cultural matrix in emerging church thought. All human theologizing is necessarily culturally and historically grounded. Jesus situated himself within history, at a specific time and place, thereby leading to a situated theology. A situated theology does not mean a limited or relativistic theology, but simply appreciates the situated contextual nature of theology. Tony Jones writes, “Emergents believe that theology is local, conversational, and temporary.”³³⁸ Theology, then, while having global impact, is conditioned by the culture and context of which one is a part.³³⁹ Both

³³⁶ Brewin, *Signs of Emergence*, 156.

³³⁷ Brewin, *Signs of Emergence*, 105.

³³⁸ Jones, *The New Christians*, 111.

³³⁹ See the following works for examples of how specifically Western or Enlightenment values have shaped the theology of the West. Newbiggin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 4, 65–150; Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 8–9; Vanhoozer, *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, 3–41.

theological thought and theological speech, is conditioned and contextualized by culture. Tony Jones speaking of the pluralistic society that surrounds the church writes, “The emergent response to pluralism is always ad hoc, always contextual, always situational.”³⁴⁰ There are only situational and contextual responses to culture, for the emerging church. Contextualized thought in the emerging church has led to contextualized praxis.

The contextualized praxis of the emerging church can be demonstrated in its worship, including the worship space, preaching, and presentation. The worship service is contextualized for a postmodern society. It recognizes that culture has shifted from being information-to-experience based. Spencer Burke and Barry Taylor comment on the current state of society, saying that “Institutional faith is struggling today because it is formulaic and knowledge-based in a world that is fluid, flexible, and open to new ways of learning and interacting.”³⁴¹ The emerging church is responding to this context by reimagining the way in which the message is given.

For example, many emerging churches can be characterized by experiential encounters with God. *Vintage Faith Church* in Santa Cruz, pastored by Dan Kimball, mixes techno music and multiple projectors with Scripture, incense, and prayer stations to create an encounter with God that is experiential.³⁴² Praying through prayer stations or painting during the service is also available so that people may encounter God in fresh ways. Kimball writes, “in our weekend worship gatherings, we combine the beauty and richness of ancient liturgy and our Jewish roots with our current local cultural

³⁴⁰ Jones, *The New Christians*, 39.

³⁴¹ Burke and Taylor, *A Heretic's Guide to Eternity*, 103.

³⁴² Kimball, *Emerging Worship*, 188–89.

expressions of worship.”³⁴³ Worship for *Vintage Faith Church* has become contextualized to a culture that is fluid and flexible. Other churches have noticed the cultural shift towards experience and so have changed their style of ministry. For example *Vaux* has an alternative worship style that is ambient, experiential, and inductive.³⁴⁴ Commenting on the services at *Vaux*, the creators write:

These services were experiments, sketches that were, by their very nature, unfinished. Thus those who attended were invited to participate in an exploration of ideas, to interact with and critique the forms presented; *Vaux* were ‘worship architects’ - designing spaces within which people could worship, but trying not to impose strict ideas about how those spaces might be used by the individual.³⁴⁵

In short, the worship spaces were fluid and flexible, generating new contextualized ways to learn and teach. *Vaux* created contextualized forms of worship, teaching, and interaction for the new postmodern society that values participation, visuals, experience, and is communally based.³⁴⁶ *Ikon* has created a similar approach that is referred to as “theo-drama.” It too is a flexible approach, where truth is encountered and experienced rather than simply “speached.”³⁴⁷

Not only has the worship service been contextualized, but so too has the preaching in emerging churches. In *Solomon’s Porch*, an emerging church in Minneapolis, one individual no longer leads preaching, but instead participation occurs from all the people present.³⁴⁸ Preaching becomes a communal journey towards a God-led destination. Preaching has then been contextualized for a participatory, journey-

³⁴³ Kimball, *Emerging Worship*, 178.

³⁴⁴ See <http://www.vaux.net/> for both pictures and their postmodern liturgies.

³⁴⁵ *Vaux*, “About *Vaux*,” no pages.

³⁴⁶ Leonard Sweet argues that the epistemology of the current postmodern culture, which *Vaux* is reaching, is experiential, participatory, image-rich, and connective (which is then combined into the acrostic E.P.I.C.). Sweet, *Post-modern Pilgrims*, 27–139.

³⁴⁷ For a list of *ikon* theo-dramas see both their website <http://www.ikon.org.uk/> and Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 77–137. For a discussion on “speaching” as the combination of creating speeches and preaching see Pagitt, *Preaching Re-Imagined*, 23–26.

³⁴⁸ Pagitt, *Reimagining Spiritual Formation*, 94–98; Pagitt, *Preaching Re-Imagined*, 20–23.

focused, and inductive culture. Dan Kimball summarizes the perspective of postmoderns, “Virtually the first thing every single person I talked to said that they wish church weren’t just a sermon but a discussion. They uniformly expressed that they do not want only to sit and listen to a preacher giving a lecture.”³⁴⁹ The postmodern culture expressly wants dialogue and interaction. *Solomon’s Porch* and many others are leading churches in a progressional dialogue format that contextualizes learning for postmodern growth. The shift towards progressional dialogue preaching does raise the issue of who has the authority within the dialogue. For the emerging church a favored metaphor for this specific issue of authority is found within the work of N.T. Wright.³⁵⁰ Wright proposes a narrative based metaphor of an unfinished Shakespearean five-act drama.³⁵¹ Wright suggests imagining that the majority of the fifth act has been lost.³⁵² To be able to complete the drama the task would be given “to highly trained, sensitive and experienced Shakespearean actors, who would immerse themselves in the first four acts, and in the language and culture of Shakespeare and his time, and who would then be told to work out a fifth act for themselves.”³⁵³ The result for Wright would be that first four acts, “existing as they did, would be the undoubted authority for the task at hand”. Wright both recognizes the necessity for the undoubted authority of Scripture, but also the necessity to complete the work of God in creativity. Wright is providing a model of authority for the emerging church that recognizes both the authority of Scripture and the need for creative

³⁴⁹ Kimball, *They Like Jesus But Not the Church*, 218.

³⁵⁰ Kevin Vanhoozer has a very similar metaphor and model that is more in-depth than that of N.T. Wright. Vanhoozer’s model that is also respected in emerging church circles but is less widely used. For an overview of his model see Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 30–33.

³⁵¹ Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 139–143.

³⁵² Wright writes that Biblically the five acts would be as follows: creation, fall, Israel, Jesus, the New Testament writings (which hint at the ending without giving the intervening steps to get there). Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 141–142.

³⁵³ Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 140.

trained disciples immersed in God's kingdom. Practically Wright's model allows for the progressional dialogue method to function with the authority of Scripture and diverse dialogue intact. The emerging church is then able to contextualize preaching to a postmodern culture that appreciates dialogue and diversity without compromising biblical authority. The emerging church, because of its understanding of the Incarnation, is creating new contextualized formats for learning that are fluid, dialogical, and open for a culture that resonates with fluidity, dialogue and openness.

The emerging church is contextual as a result of its understanding of Jesus' incarnational ministry. The theology, missional methodology, and praxis of the emerging church are contextual. Doug Pagitt summarizes the desire of the emerging church; saying that what is needed is a "more contextual understanding of what God is saying to us in our day in order to live into it."³⁵⁴ The point of contextualizing is not to be syncretistic or relativistic, but to be in tune with what God is saying and how his Incarnation is seeking to be made real in the current cultural midst. Ray Anderson writes, "Emerging churches' language is that of the people; their message is communicated through culture; their presence in the world is ordinary, so as to get within arms length to embrace others with extraordinary love."³⁵⁵ In essence the emerging church contextualizes to be able to share the extraordinary love and grace of Jesus Christ to a culture in need of it.

Incarnation as Identification

The emerging church identifies with postmoderns, following Jesus' incarnational model. Jesus' Incarnation demonstrates his willingness to identify with the people he

³⁵⁴ Pagitt, "The Emerging Church and Embodied Theology," 127.

³⁵⁵ Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches*, 17.

loves. Jesus, the Son of God, “is God incarnate who identifies with us. . . . One thing the Incarnation tells us is that Jesus Christ identifies with us in our human condition, yet without sin.”³⁵⁶ The emerging church, taking its cue from Jesus, chooses to identify with postmoderns. Alan Hirsch, encouraging identification within the emerging church, writes: “to act incarnationally . . . will mean that in our mission to those outside the faith we will need to exercise a genuine identification and affinity with those we are attempting to reach.”³⁵⁷ The emerging church has both an affinity and an incarnational identification with those who are postmodern.³⁵⁸

The emerging church identifies with postmoderns, as symbolic of Jesus’ identification with humanity. While there is certainly debate as to when identification crosses the line into syncretism, the need for identification is both biblical and missional. Identifying with a people is the first step in being able to reach them for Jesus Christ. In general there are three broad categories of the identification of the emerging church with postmoderns: first, where the emerging church identifies and ministers *to postmoderns* (relevants); second, where the emerging church identifies and ministers *with postmoderns* (reconstructionists); third, where the emerging church identifies and ministers *as postmoderns* (revisionists).³⁵⁹ While each group identifies with postmodernity to a

³⁵⁶ McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, 108.

³⁵⁷ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 133.

³⁵⁸ The emerging church in identifying with postmodernism is not excluding, in the negative sense, those who embrace modernity. The emerging church is simply making an intentional differentiation between modernity and postmodernity while simultaneously affirming the evil of exclusion. The emerging church in this respect follows Miroslav Volf and his writing in *Exclusion and Embrace*. He writes, “A judgment that names exclusion as evil and differentiation as a positive good, then, is itself not an act of exclusion. To the contrary such judgment is the beginning of the struggle against exclusion.” Volf though also warns that any act of differentiation must be made in humility and caution because of the inclination to “misperceive and misjudge because we desire to exclude.” Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 68.

³⁵⁹ These categories are taken from Scot McKnight’s address at Westminster Seminary. The relevants, reconstructionists, and revisionists categories are congruent taxonomies that come from Ed Setzer. Mark Driscoll uses Setzer’s work as a base to comment on how the emerging church identifies with postmodernism. See McKnight, *Five Streams of the Emerging Church*; Setzer, “The Emergent/Emerging

different *degree*, each group does share the belief that God can be found in postmodern culture. Stanley Grenz and John Franke explain:

Because the life-giving Creator Spirit is present wherever life flourishes, the Spirit's voice can conceivably resound through many media including the media of human culture. . . . Consequently, we should listen intently for the voice of the Spirit, who is present in all life and therefore who 'precedes' us into the world, bubbling to the surface through the artifacts and symbols humans construct.³⁶⁰

The emerging church, following Grenz and Franke, believes that God's Spirit can be found within postmodernity. The following discussion outlines the ways in which these three broad emerging responses identify with postmodernism and their differences.

Relevants minister *to* postmoderns. In this instance the emerging church understands, relates, and contextualizes their ministry to postmodern people. The emerging church ministers to postmoderns as a culture and worldview needing to be reached. This group sees postmoderns "as trapped in moral relativism and epistemological bankruptcy – they have no moral compass and they are afraid to render judgment on the truth."³⁶¹ This group relates and identifies with those they are seeking to reach to ensure that the gospel is properly understood. Those who minister to postmoderns are generally theologically conservative and concerned about updating *the method* of relating to gospel to postmoderns, *but not the message*. Relevants' "methodology may be considered by critics to be progressive."³⁶² However, in general this group is theologically conservative, but willing to identify with postmodernism in terms of their method of proclaiming the gospel. In essence this group within the emerging church is seeking to make the gospel relevant so that it can be understood and

Church: A Missiological Perspective," 46–91; Driscoll, "A Pastoral Perspective on the Emerging Church," 89–90.

³⁶⁰ Franke and Grenz, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 162.

³⁶¹ McKnight, *Five Streams of the Emerging Church*, 11–12.

³⁶² Setzer, "The Emergent/Emerging Church," 72.

transformative.³⁶³ Their goal is “to be more relevant; thus appealing to postmodern-minded people.”³⁶⁴ In short, relevants identify with postmodern people so that they can reach them for the sake of Christ.

The second broad group within the emerging church is those who minister *with* postmoderns. This group identifies with postmoderns at a greater degree than relevants. This group not only ministers to them, but alongside them. Scot McKnight writes:

They live with, work with, and converse with postmoderns and they accept their postmodernity as a fact of life in our world. Because the Christian’s calling is to be ‘paracletic’ instead of ‘parasitic,’ the Christian will accept postmodernity as the present condition of the world in which we are now called to proclaim and live out the gospel.³⁶⁵

This group, called reconstructionists by Driscoll and Setzer, not only minister *to* postmoderns, but *alongside them*, accepting their worldview as the state of society. This group would see postmodernity as simply the cultural lens through which life is lived, just as the lens was modernity, prior to today. This group then identifies with postmodernism, not as ‘biblical’ or necessary, but simply as reality for the current culture, and seeks to follow God in a missional-incarnational way. Reconstructionists believe that the traditional evangelical church has areas that need to be revamped. In general this group is more radical than the first, believing that, not only must our methods change, but that the message of the gospel has lost some of its potency because of Christendom.³⁶⁶ In short, reconstructionists identify with postmoderns and walk with them on their journey to Christ.

The third group identifies with postmoderns and ministers *as postmoderns*. This

³⁶³ Examples of possible “relevants” are Dan Kimball, Donald Miller, and Rob Bell (although Bell might fit within the reconstructionists camp).

³⁶⁴ Driscoll, “A Pastoral Perspective on the Emerging Church,” 89.

³⁶⁵ McKnight, *Five Streams of the Emerging Church*, 12.

³⁶⁶ For example see the work of Neil Cole, Alan Hirsch, Michael Frost, and Frank Viola.

third grouping is by far the most controversial grouping within the emerging church, yet they too follow the Incarnation by identifying with postmoderns. Setzer and Driscoll call this group the “revisionists”. They totally identify and connect with postmoderns and adopt postmodernism, as their own cultural worldview. This group embraces “the human condition of not knowing absolute truth or at least not knowing truth absolutely – and they speak of a proper confidence and a chastened epistemology and the end of metanarratives and the fundamental importance of social location as shaping what we know and find to be true.”³⁶⁷ Revisionists receive most of the attention within the emerging church due to depth of their identification with postmoderns. This group definitely identifies with postmoderns and ministers to them as one of their own.³⁶⁸

In these three general ways the emerging church clearly demonstrates an incarnational identification with postmodernity. Mark Driscoll, a hostile critic of the emerging church, does in fact recognize their desire to identify for the sake of mission. He writes, “What ties each of these types of Emerging Christians together is a missiological conversation about what a faithful church should believe and do to reach a Western culture.”³⁶⁹ What is clear is that these three groups identify with postmodernism out of missiological and theological conviction. An in-depth examination of what level of identification is justified is beyond the scope of this paper due to the diversity within the emerging church. Each individual community would need to be evaluated based on its level of identification as evidenced through their belief and praxis. Yet some clear parameters regarding identification can be given. Lesslie Newbigin, a key influencer of emerging church leaders, recognizes two potential dangers of identification. First, if one

³⁶⁷ McKnight, *Five Streams of the Emerging Church*, 13.

³⁶⁸ Examples of this third grouping would be Tony Jones, Doug Pagitt, and Brian McLaren.

³⁶⁹ Driscoll, “A Pastoral Perspective on the Emerging Church,” 93.

does not identify enough the message may not be communicated effectively. Second, if identification occurs too much with the culture it may simply become familiar and not call for conversion. Newbigin writes, “In the attempt to be ‘relevant’ one may fall into syncretism, and in the effort to avoid syncretism one may become irrelevant.”³⁷⁰ This is the tension emerging churches face. To avoid falling into either the danger of irrelevance or syncretism the emerging church seeks to be both culturally sensitive and critical. Miroslav Volf writes that the church must, in their social embodiments of the Gospel, be both culturally sensitive and culturally critical.³⁷¹ In this principle Volf is arguing for a double distinctive that is both subversive and relevant.³⁷² Therefore the church can be both relevant and yet avoid syncretism as it deconstructs culture using its own cultural norms. While debate will continue to swirl concerning the depth of identification that is justified, it is clear that the emerging church takes the principle of identification seriously. Jesus identified with humanity, and because of that example, the emerging church wholeheartedly identifies with those needing the gospel.

Summary

The church acquires its existence through Christ, and therefore must reflect him.³⁷³ In this sense ecclesiology is to be incarnational. The church, empowered by the Spirit, is to reflect Jesus Christ. Furthermore, for any ecclesiology to be deemed both positive and advantageous it must be incarnational; if a church is not incarnational it

³⁷⁰ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 7.

³⁷¹ Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 5.

³⁷² See N.T. Wright’s writing on the double dissimilarity of Jesus for how Jesus’ calling was both relevant and deconstructing of the essential “Jewishness”. Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, 28; 65; and 77–80.

³⁷³ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 338.

looses its identity and focal point. Therefore the preceding evaluation is crucial to be able to determine the advantageous nature of the emerging church. If the emerging church is to be advantageous and positive it must be incarnational.

The preceding evaluation applied the incarnational principles, generated in chapter two, to the emerging church. Through the evaluation it is clear that the emerging church is incarnational. Flowing from an incarnational understanding of Jesus' ministry, the emerging church seeks to be incarnational in terms of its theology and ecclesiology. It is clear that the emerging church is still developing, but it is developing along incarnational lines. The incarnational theology and ecclesiology of the emerging church can be seen in its "sentness," posture, close proximity to others, contextualization, and identification with others. The above-mentioned principles are signposts guiding the emerging church in its engagement with the world. While the examination above is clearly not exhaustive, it is descriptive of the emerging church, demonstrating its incarnational bent and ethos. In short, the emerging church espouses and practices an incarnational ecclesiology for a postmodern age. Therefore it can be preliminarily said that the emerging church is valuable and beneficial. The incarnational nature of the emerging church demonstrates a clear benefit of its ecclesiology. But for the emerging church to truly be embraced as both advantageous and positive it must also be missional. The church is not only to reflect Christ (incarnational), but is to partner with him in his mission (missional). Therefore the next step is to evaluate the emerging church along missional lines.

CHAPTER 4: THE MISSIONAL NATURE OF THE EMERGING CHURCH

The emerging church is a new and valuable development of “church” precisely because its ecclesiology is both missional and incarnational. Chapter three explored the incarnational nature of the emerging church. This chapter highlights the areas in which the theology of the missional nature of God has resulted in shaping the very nature of the emerging church’s ecclesiology. Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch comment that, “a missional church is the hope of the post-Christendom era.”³⁷⁴ This chapter evaluates the emerging church to discern whether it is truly missional and thereby a hope for post-Christendom society. The emerging church is evaluated by utilizing the biblically based principles outlined in Chapter Two. The specific missional aspects of the emerging church are discussed along with specific missional examples within the emerging church.

Mission Directing Ministry

Within the emerging church mission directs and shapes the ministry of the church. The emerging church sees itself as an “organic collective of believers, centred on Jesus and sent out into the world to serve others in his name.”³⁷⁵ Being sent on God’s mission directs the purpose and self-understanding of the emerging church; mission directs its ecclesiology. Dan Kimball writes that the, “exciting part is that the emerging church really sees church as mission.”³⁷⁶ In general, the emerging church “rather than seeing mission as one of the functions of the church . . . sees it as its central organizing purpose.”³⁷⁷ The church exists for mission and therefore must be orientated by mission

³⁷⁴ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 17.

³⁷⁵ Frost and Hirsch, *ReJesus*, 28.

³⁷⁶ Kimball, “The Stained Glass Perspective,” 197.

³⁷⁷ Frost and Hirsch, *ReJesus*, 180.

and towards mission. Gordon Cosby has noted that groups that come together out of a non-missional purpose rarely if ever turn into missional congregations.³⁷⁸ Missional ministry cannot be added later. For the emerging church the mission of God is centrally present in their ministry, and shapes it. Alan Hirsch summarizes, “If evangelizing and discipling the nations lies at the heart of the church’s purpose in the world, then it is mission, and not ministry, that is the true organizing principle of the church.”³⁷⁹ Mission does lie at the heart of the emerging church and therefore directs ministry in three primary ways. First, the mission of God is communal and relational. Second, the mission of God is holistic in its scope. Third, the mission of God is centred in Jesus Christ. These three principles shape and drive the ministry of the emerging church.

Communal-Relational Mission: The Emerging Church’s Focus

The mission of God is both relational and communal, thereby necessitating a communal-relational ministry. The centrality of this mission of God is briefly highlighted below, followed by an examination of the communal and relational focus of the ministry of the emerging church.

God in his mission is both communal and relationally focused. The mission of God flows from his very nature, which is in essence relational and communal.³⁸⁰ The Trinity is communally based in personal relationships. Radical individualism is countered by radical interdependency in the very life of God. David Cunningham writes, “Trinitarian theology insists that a ‘person’ is not an autonomous centre of consciousness, nor a radically private entity; rather persons are necessarily woven into the lives of other

³⁷⁸ As quoted in Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 235.

³⁷⁹ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 235–36.

³⁸⁰ Stanly Grenz and John Franke comment that, “perhaps the single most significant development in the contemporary renaissance of Trinitarian theology has been the emphasis on relationality.” Franke and Grenz, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 193.

persons.”³⁸¹ The very fabric of life is interwoven connections. The mission of God flows from the nature of God resulting in a mission that is both communal and relational. Scot McKnight writes, “The first understanding of Jesus is a complex story of both personal redemption and ecclesial recreation: it is the story of liberation from sin and oppression so God’s people can live in the new community just as they were designed to live.”³⁸² God’s missional goal is thoroughly relational and community-focused, with the re-creation of healed individuals living in community. God’s goal is not simply to heal individuals but to heal the fractured relationships between individuals creating a new *ecclesia* (assembly or church) of love.³⁸³ Christianity was “never intended to be a private affair.”³⁸⁴ There is an ecclesial focus to redemption and life with God. Scot McKnight summarizes, “Because God is a community of Three-In-One, God’s work is always relational and community-focused.”³⁸⁵ God is the director of the ministry of the emerging church. Therefore if God’s mission and work is relational and community-focused, so too must be the emerging church’s ministry. The relational and communal ministry of the emerging church, as shaped by God’s mission, is elaborated below.

The mission of God shapes the emerging church focus into a relational focus that can be demonstrated in both thought and praxis.³⁸⁶ First, in its thought it functions with a

³⁸¹ Cunningham, “The Trinity,” 198.

³⁸² McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, 88.

³⁸³ Andrew Perriman commenting on God choosing to use Abraham, and his family for mission writes: “If this is the starting point for understanding the purpose of the church, it suggests that we need to think in terms not of individuals but of groups – nations, cultures, communities. The fundamental initiative of God is to choose a ‘people for his treasured possession, out of all the people who are on the face of the earth’ (Deut 14:2).” Perriman, *Re:Mission*, 14.

³⁸⁴ McNeal, *The Present Future*, 82.

³⁸⁵ McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, 27.

³⁸⁶ Demonstrating a relational focus in thought and action presupposes a relational essence or being, which begins with God. Humanity is a relational being, as it is founded in the image of God (Gen 1:26). Grenz writes, “The doctrine of the Trinity asserts, throughout all eternity God is community, the fellowship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who comprise the Triune God. The creation of humankind in the divine image, therefore, can mean nothing less than that humans express the relational dynamic of the God whose

relational understanding of life and knowledge rather than a foundationalist understanding. The emerging church understands modernity to be based upon a foundationalist structure.³⁸⁷ In a foundationalist perspective, practice would be determined structurally by theology, which would in turn be determined by Scripture.³⁸⁸ Within the emerging church, however the relationship between Scripture, theology, and practice is relational rather than foundational. Each area is in a mutually influential relationship with the other. That is not to say that Scripture is not the norm, but simply recognizes that practice influences theology, just as one's theological method affects how one views Scripture. Brian McLaren uses the analogy of shifting from seeing faith as a building with a foundation, to seeing it as a spider web with several anchor points.³⁸⁹ Even within a web or fabric of beliefs, the central doctrines or values are still the central hubs, but in a relational-influential way, rather than a foundational way.³⁹⁰ The key for the emerging church is that beliefs and values do not just relate to each other in a structural-hierarchical format but are interconnected through a web of connections or a "web of belief."³⁹¹ Therefore for the emerging church knowledge and thought itself is relational.

Second, the emerging church is relationally focused in praxis. Relationships become the foundation for ministry rather than programs. While the emerging church is

representation we are called to be." He continues, "We come to find our true identity – we come to exemplify our true essence – only as we live out the design and destiny God has for us. This design is that we participate together with others in the community of the followers of Christ." Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 179; and 180.

³⁸⁷ For an examination into the foundational nature of modernity see Franke and Grenz, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 31.

³⁸⁸ This example is taken from Jones, *Postmodern Youth Ministry*, 19.

³⁸⁹ McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian*, 54.

³⁹⁰ Jones, *Postmodern Youth Ministry*, 138.

³⁹¹ See McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian*, 54–59 and Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*, 85–109.

not anti-programming, the central focus of ministry is relationships. Neil Cole writes, “We must take Christ into people’s lives, and it must be in the context of relationships.”³⁹² Relationships become the focus and also the measure of success for the emerging church. Brad Cecil writes about the relational focus and depth of the emerging church:

We are not interested in short-term relationships or meeting a person’s needs or functioning as a spiritual vendor for people. Rather we want to be a community of people committed to sharing life together. We don’t desire growth for growth’s sake but a community that grows slowly through natural introductions. We don’t measure our success by numeric growth. We have decided to measure by other means, such as, how long do relationships last? Are members of the community at peace with one another? Are relationships reconciled?³⁹³

For Cecil the very nature of the church is communal and relational. For him, and for others in the emerging church, the very measure of success is relational.

The emerging church is committed to fostering deep relationships over an extended length of time rather than simply providing a spiritual consumeristic function. Relationships are central to the ministry, evaluation, and participation within the emerging church. It pours resources such as time and money into developing relationships rather than structures and programs.³⁹⁴ The emerging church recognizes that what is powerful is not programs and buildings but deep relationships. Jonathon Campbell says, “In our current cultural crisis, the most powerful demonstration of the reality of the gospel is a community embodying the way, the truth, and the life of Jesus.”³⁹⁵ A community that is truly connected with God is a powerful relational draw in

³⁹² Cole, *Organic Church*, xxvii.

³⁹³ Brad Cecil as quoted in Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 99.

³⁹⁴ Michael Frost, and Alan Hirsch write, “The missional-incarnational church will spend more time on building friendships than it will on developing religious programs.” Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 44.

³⁹⁵ Jonathon Campbell quoted in Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 89.

a culture of shallow relationships and commitments. A relational ministry drives the emerging church. The mission of God is inextricably bound to relationships. Therefore, for the emerging church, all-missional activity must be relational.

The ministry of the emerging church is also communal in focus through being shaped by God's mission. The Spirit "creates not just individualistic Christians but a community in which love redemptively creates fellowship."³⁹⁶ The communal focus of the emerging church can be demonstrated specifically in the emerging church's experience of salvation.

The salvific focus of the emerging church is communal. Its salvific focus is a shift from modernity's hyper-individualism. David Fitch writes, "Evangelicals are individualists . . . we have always seen God as working first in individuals and then in social groupings of people."³⁹⁷ The focus on individuals has led to the popularization of the idea of "personal salvation." Brian McLaren, voicing the fear of many within the emerging church writes, "I fear that for too many Christians, 'personal salvation' has become another personal consumer product."³⁹⁸ While McLaren and others in the emerging church do not disdain the individual nature of salvation, they are simply seeking to have the individual salvation framed communally.³⁹⁹ McLaren makes his viewpoint clear: "Although I believe in Jesus as my personal savior, I am not a Christian for that reason. I am a Christian because I believe that Jesus is the Savior of the whole

³⁹⁶ McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, 120.

³⁹⁷ Fitch, *The Great Giveaway*, 33.

³⁹⁸ McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 99.

³⁹⁹ Andrew Perriman, a postmodern theologian, explains why theologically the idea of "personal salvation" must be understood first within the communal calling of Israel. He writes, "The 'good news' that is proclaimed in the Gospels is a message to Israel and about Israel . . . this story about the 'salvation' of Israel cannot be regarded as merely the historical husk encasing a gospel of personal salvation and eternal life." Perriman, *Re:Mission*, 40-41.

world.”⁴⁰⁰ The emerging church, being post-individualistic, retains the focus on individuals but combines that focus with a communal-relational aspect. Salvation is “something that happens between God and people individually and has communal implications.”⁴⁰¹ Jesus is interested in saving individuals but his salvific work cannot be reduced to individuals because Jesus is saving the whole of creation.

The communal focus to salvation has practical implications in the emerging church’s conception of being “born again.” Being “born again” or saved is not simply an individual salvific moment. In the emerging church it means being born into a new communal culture and values. Being born again is a re-definition of life in relation to a community of faith. Shane Claiborne and Chris Haw write that, “Being born again redefines family: it grants a new way to see the world, a way to see right past the artificial borders we create and proclaims a deeper allegiance and affection.”⁴⁰² The believer is adopted into the family of God, and enters into a new way of viewing life. Conversion means, “becoming part of a people. And not just any people. Conversion means adoption into the chosen people of God.”⁴⁰³ The individual enters into the community of God in salvation. For the emerging church, then, communal expressions of body-life are key for the ministry of the church. *Solomon’s Porch* has hospitality meals together frequently to remind themselves and others interested in joining in God’s mission that it is a family mission.⁴⁰⁴ For Alan Hirsch and his church community the communal focus has resulted in the practice of “tithing” meals. Out of the 21 meals a week, 2–3 are to be eaten with others in the community, both insiders and outsiders, as a visible reminder of the

⁴⁰⁰ McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 100.

⁴⁰¹ Burke and Taylor, *A Heretic’s Guide to Eternity*, 41.

⁴⁰² Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*, 108.

⁴⁰³ Wilson-Hartgrove, “Conversion,” 29.

⁴⁰⁴ Pagitt, *Reimagining Spiritual Formation*, 101–13.

communal nature of God.⁴⁰⁵ The emerging church, then, in both its conception and practice of salvation as inclusion into a family, is clearly communally focused. The emerging church is shaped by the mission of God to become both relational and communal in focus.

Holistic Mission: The Emerging Church's Scope of Mission

The scope of God's mission is holistic and total. Scot McKnight writes, "Holism is at the heart of being missional: a *missio Dei* foundation for missional presence and work is a commitment to a whole gospel for whole people for the whole world – heart, soul, mind, strength for everyone."⁴⁰⁶ God is Lord for everyone and over all areas of life. Frost writes, "God is ONE and the task of our lives is to bring every aspect of our lives communal, and individual, under this One God, Yahweh."⁴⁰⁷ Therefore Christians are called to bring each area of their lives under God including work, domestic life, health, and worship.⁴⁰⁸ Michael Frost, becoming explicit, says, "There is no such thing as sacred and secular in a biblical worldview. It can conceive of no part of the world that does not come under the claim of Yahweh's lordship."⁴⁰⁹ Therefore the call of God's mission is all encompassing and holistic. Since God's missional scope is holistic in its width, so too must the ministry of the emerging church. Mission must be holistic; it cannot be segmented to only a "spiritual" or "sacred" realm.⁴¹⁰ Instead, the ministry within emerging church must match the missional width of God's purposes. Its ministry matches

⁴⁰⁵ Hirsch, "A Day with Alan Hirsch."

⁴⁰⁶ McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, 135.

⁴⁰⁷ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 90.

⁴⁰⁸ See Rob Bell's DVD *Everything is Spiritual* where he argues from Genesis that there is no word for spiritual in Hebrew, because God was a part of each area of life. *Everything is Spiritual*.

⁴⁰⁹ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 91.

⁴¹⁰ David Bosch comments on the move towards to holism writing it "makes sense that in missionary circles today, but elsewhere as well, the mediating of 'comprehensive', 'integral', 'total', or 'universal', salvation is increasingly identified as the purpose of mission, in this was overcoming the inherent dualism in the traditional and more recent models." Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 399.

God's missional scope in a few key ways. First, its conception of salvation is holistic. Second, its scope of involvement in the world is holistic, including, politics, the environment, and economics.

The holistic missional impulse of God is practically expressed in the emerging church's scope in relation to salvation. For the emerging church God's holistic mission means that it is not acceptable to minister only to segments of society or limited dimensions of a person. This holistic salvific focus supersedes previous generations' struggles with the social justice/evangelism dichotomy.⁴¹¹ For emergents a church is not a church unless it cares for both.⁴¹² David Bosch, a key missiological figure for the emerging church, comments that a true missional perspective much minister in a holistic way. Bosch states that mission emphasizes "that we should find a way *beyond* every schizophrenic position and minister to people in their *total* need, that we should involve individual as well as society, soul *and* body, present *and* future in our ministry of salvation."⁴¹³ Within the emerging church there is a desire to minister to the whole person. Therefore the social justice/evangelism bipolarity dissolves into dialectic due to the scope of the mission of God for world. Brian McLaren writes, "The missional approach changed everything . . . it eliminates old dichotomies like 'evangelism' and 'social action'. Both are integrated in expressing saving love for the world."⁴¹⁴ A

⁴¹¹ Lesslie Newbigin comments that this structural dichotomy in mission was especially seen in denominational structures that stressed social justice, while at the congregational level spiritual conversion was emphasized. But Newbigin believes it is only in maintaining the proper relationship between the two that the Christian message retains its power. Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 11.

⁴¹² Emerging Christians, following Helmut Thielecke, believe that to separate the spiritual and secular is heresy. For emergents this action is a modern form of Docetism. See Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 20.

⁴¹³ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 399 (emphasis original).

⁴¹⁴ McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 108.

missional approach and scope joins previously divided approaches. Si Johnston explains the connection between social justice and salvation:

Social [justice] can be construed (certainly in the U.K.) as devoid of spirituality. Instead, we encourage and teach a “joined-up” spirituality, which see evangelism and social service/action/justice in a synthesis. Loving God and loving your neighbor are two sides of one coin. The Enlightenment has forced a wedge in here and seems to erode the composite nature of shalom. . . . We understand shalom/re-creation/salvation as the bringing about of well-being to every level of people's existence in the here and now.⁴¹⁵

God’s mission is for all spheres of life, for all people, for the present, and the future. The mission of God is *all-encompassing*, leading to ministry to the whole person. Doug Pagitt writes, “When we minister to people we minister to the whole person.”⁴¹⁶ Mission must encompass the totality of existence because God’s missional scope is nothing less than cosmos-wide. The reality of the monotheistic salvific claim of God results in the impossibility of a fragmented mission. The emerging church’s scope of salvation is clearly shaped by the missional impulse of God.

The emerging church is involved with politics as an outworking of the missional scope of God’s holistic purpose. God’s holistic missional scope encompasses politics, thereby necessitating political involvement. In fact Newbigin writes that to deny political responsibilities is an act of apostasy.⁴¹⁷ Newbigin continues:

The church today cannot without guilt absolve itself from the responsibility to the public life of nations and the global ordering of industry and commerce in the light of the Christian faith. Even where the church is a tiny minority with no political power, it has the duty to address the governing authority of the civil community with the word of God.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁵ Si Johnston quoted in Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 142–43.

⁴¹⁶ Pagitt, *A Christianity Worth Believing*, 85.

⁴¹⁷ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 129.

⁴¹⁸ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 129.

The emerging church as a result of God's missional scope is involved in the public life, and political realm. The emerging church is defiantly calling the government to walk with justice, to pursue peace, and to care for the hurting.⁴¹⁹ Politically, the emerging church is regaining its prophetic voice. Brian Walsh and Sylvia Keesmaat explain the prophetic nature of the emerging church in both practical and theological terms:

When the state functions as an empire . . . and if the empire is war-mongering, then the Christian community is called to be a witness for peace. . . . If the empire enacts social policy that leaves the poor destitute, establishes trade policy that legitimates unfair trade practices, and passes environmental laws that allows global warming to go unchecked, species to go extinct at alarming rates, and our waterways to become chemical sewage dumps, then a Christian politics of compassion, kindness, and meekness both lobby for alternative politics and attempts to live in a way that is consistent with these foundational Christian virtues.⁴²⁰

Walsh and Keesmaat masterfully summarize a postmodern emerging church political ethic. Christians are called to be active in both lobbying for change and providing an alternative posture.⁴²¹

The ministry of the emerging church, as shaped by God's missional scope, includes environmental concerns. The emerging church is placing environmental concerns as a key issue because of the scope of God's mission. From a biblical perspective, "ecological brokenness is rooted in human sin."⁴²² Therefore to be missional in a holistic scope, as God demands, requires an ecological perspective. Wendell Berry,

⁴¹⁹ For examples see the following emergent books focusing on the prophetic calling of Christians in politics: Bell and Golden, *Jesus Wants to Save Christians*, 118–38 ; Keesmaat and Walsh, *Colossians Remixed*, 147–220; Claiborne and Haw's book *Jesus for President* is a consistent call to the government to value peace, justice, and love. See especially, "Section 3: When the Empire Got Baptized," 139–224.

⁴²⁰ Keesmaat and Walsh, *Colossians Remixed*, 186–87.

⁴²¹ In respect to deciding Christlike actions, it is important to remember that the emerging churches functions with minimal leadership or leaderless groups. In this way the body as a whole would decide upon a Christlike course of action. The emerging church "operates as a consensual process in which all have a say in influencing outcomes." Practically this is one reason why emerging churches are intentionally small and multiply when they become too large. Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 192.

⁴²² Keesmaat and Walsh, 195.

postmodern poet beloved by the emerging church, writes, “Our destruction of nature is not just bad stewardship, or stupid economics, or a betrayal of family responsibility; it is the most horrid blasphemy. It is flinging God’s gifts into his face, as if they were of no worth beyond that assigned to them by our destruction of them.”⁴²³ For the emerging church ecological involvement is central to loving God and his mission. Brian Walsh and Sylvia Keesmaat write, “Our relationship to lions, gazelles, wetlands, ozone layers and backyard gardens – that is, our mode of ecological relationality – is to image the love of God that fills the earth.”⁴²⁴ The emerging church as a missional response to God’s scope of redemption is seeking to creatively relate to ecology out of love. Michael Frost believes that followers of Jesus will be motivated by love, and by faith to care for the earth.⁴²⁵ To be able to better fulfill God’s mission in renewing and caring for the environment, the emerging church is becoming creative. Some have moved to enable walking to work, others have created washing machines that work on a stationary bike, and others have created grease co-ops.⁴²⁶ For the emerging church the earth, “isn’t’ just a boring lump of secular earth but a divine miracle, a creation.”⁴²⁷ The emerging church is seeking to be actively involved in the missional redemption of the earth because God’s mission is cosmos-wide.

The emerging church, as a result of seeing God’s mission as holistic in scope, is also involved in economics. God’s mission sets the ministry of the emerging church; God’s missional activity includes claiming lordship and restoration within economics.⁴²⁸

⁴²³ Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community*, 98.

⁴²⁴ Keesmaat and Walsh, *Colossians Remixed*, 196

⁴²⁵ Frost, *Exiles*, 249.

⁴²⁶ Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*, 247–48.

⁴²⁷ Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*, 248.

⁴²⁸ Keesmaat and Walsh, *Colossians Remixed*, 189.

The point is to secede from globalization, the empire, the worship of the marketplace, and to further God's mission within economics.⁴²⁹ Sylvia Keesmaat and Brain Walsh comment, "What is at stake in globalization is not only the production and consumption of products, but more important, the construction of a homogenized global consumerist consciousness. Globalism wants more than your pocketbook, it wants your soul."⁴³⁰ To redeem economics, many within the emerging church are moving towards local co-ops, bartering and buying only local items, growing their own food, and becoming actively informed and intentional concerning the economic ramifications of their purchases.⁴³¹ Such actions are missional, because they are based in an ethic of compassion, equality, and redemption; they value the personhood of others in the majority world over wealth. Compassion drives the secession from the profit driven bottom line.⁴³² In short, it is truly missional to be concerned about how one's purchasing contributes to justice, love, and mercy across the globe. If one's spending generates poverty, inequality, difficulty, and death, it cannot be missional. Therefore the emerging church is missionally active in the realm of economics both locally and globally because of God's missional scope.⁴³³ God's

⁴²⁹ Harvey Cox writes, "I am beginning to think that for all the religions of the world, however they may differ from one another, the religion of the Market has become the most formidable rival, the more so because it is rarely recognized as a religion." Harvey Cox, "The Market as God: Living in the New Dispensation," no pages.

⁴³⁰ Keesmaat and Walsh, *Colossians Remixed*, 29.

⁴³¹ Keesmaat and Walsh, *Colossians Remixed*, 190

⁴³² Naomi Klein explains some of the normal economic practices of today's society. She writes, "Regardless of where EPZ's [Economic Processing Zones] are located, the workers' stories have a certain mesmerizing sameness: the workday is long – fourteen hours in Sri Lanka, twelve hours in Indonesia, sixteen in Southern China, twelve in the Philippines. The vast majority of the workers are women, always young, always working for subcontractors from Korea, Taiwan or Hong Kong. The contractors are usually filling orders for companies based in the U.S., Britain, Japan, Germany or Canada. The management is military in style, the supervisors often abusive, the wages below subsistence, the work low-skill and tedious." A Christian response to such conditions, based out of compassion and love, must be secession. Such secession is missional as it promotes love, kindness, and when coupled with activism, change. Klein, *No Logo*, 205.

⁴³³ Keesmaat and Walsh, *Colossians Remixed*, 214.

missional scope sets the agenda for the emerging church; that agenda must include economics.

In summary, the emerging church's ministry is holistic because it is shaped by God's holistic missional scope. Lesslie Newbigin writes, "The Church cannot accept as its role simply the winning of individuals to a kind of Christian discipleship which concerns only the private and domestic aspects of life."⁴³⁴ The emerging church has truly embraced a scope of mission that is beyond the private, and domestic aspects of life. The scope of the emerging church's salvific co-operation with God is holistic, including the whole person. Practically, it is involved in politics, the environment, and economics as a result of the width of God's all-encompassing mission. Doug Pagitt provides a good summary of the holistic ministry of the emerging church in relation to spiritual formation:

We are working with a view of spiritual formation in which we forget about working on a part of a person's life, and instead work with people as if there is no distinction between the spiritual, emotional, physical, social, professional, and private aspects of life. We hope the result of this vision of human formation will be a move toward a place where we focus on the holistic formation of people who are in harmony with God in all arenas of life, and who seek to live in the way of Jesus in every relationship, every situation, every moment.⁴³⁵

The holistic mission of God encompasses each and every area of life for the emerging church.⁴³⁶ Each community will set their specific agenda for holistic ministry in conjunction with the Spirit, Scriptures, and congregation. The scope of God's mission is the world and its multitude of issues. The emerging church dares to believe that God wants to use Christians as his instrument to bring change and life on a worldwide scale. The key for the emerging church is to not allow "the empire to captivate [its] imagination

⁴³⁴ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 222.

⁴³⁵ Pagitt, *Reimagining Spiritual Formation*, 22.

⁴³⁶ Phyllis Tickle notes that such a holistic vision relates remarkably well to a current culture of holism and holistic lifestyles. Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 95–97.

and set the final terms of [its] praxis in the world, because we can see a kingdom that is alternative to the empire”.⁴³⁷ The emerging church therefore allows the holistic scope of God’s mission to direct its ministry to the entire world.

Christ-Centred Mission: The Emerging Church’s Centre of Mission

God’s mission to the world is Christocentric.⁴³⁸ Jesus Christ, providing the atoning sacrifice, is the centrepiece of God’s salvific action in history. As God missionally acts within history bringing salvation, healing, and restoration to the entire world, Jesus Christ is key. Lesslie Newbigin writes, “At the heart of the story, as the key to the whole, is the Incarnation of the Word, the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus.”⁴³⁹ Therefore, for God’s mission to direct the ministry of the emerging church, its ministry must be Jesus-centred as well. The Jesus-centred ministry of the emerging church can be seen in a two related ways.

First, the emerging church works diligently to ensure that Jesus remains the central focus rather than the church. The emerging church seeks to draw people to Jesus and not to the church. Reggie McNeal writes, “In North America the invitation to become a Christian has become largely an invitation to convert to the church.”⁴⁴⁰ The emerging

⁴³⁷ Keesmaat and Walsh, *Colossians Remixed*, 156.

⁴³⁸ While God’s mission is Christocentric, because Jesus Christ provides the atoning sacrifice, it is also Trinitarian. Due to space constraints the Trinitarian nature of the emerging church’s ecclesiology cannot fully be commented upon. But the emerging church does recognize both the importance of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit in mission. Scripturally, it is clear that God the Father is a model for believers (Matt 5:48; and Luke 6:36), he provides (Matt 6:25–34), desires each person to be saved (Matt 18:14), sends Jesus out of love (John 3:16), is the author of salvation (Eph 1:2–3; and 1 Pet 1:2–4), and is active in the world (John 5:17). The role of the Holy Spirit is also important as the Spirit convicts people of their sin (John 16:8), encourages (John 14:16), produces fruit within a believers life (Gal 5:22–23), renews (Titus 3:5), empowers and equips believers (1 Cor 12:1–11), and intercedes for believers on their behalf (Rom 8:26). For a fuller discussion on the Trinitarian nature of the emerging church see Mobsby, *The Becoming of G–D*, 65–82.

⁴³⁹ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 99.

⁴⁴⁰ McNeal, *The Present Future*, 11.

church is wary of Christianity turning into “Churchianity.”⁴⁴¹ To become a Christian means to engage and partner with Jesus in his mission on earth, rather than “going to church.” In God’s mission, “the church is the catalyst, not the goal.”⁴⁴² This is precisely what the emerging church seeks to do. Rather than drawing people to a church, the emerging church is drawn by Jesus out into mission. For example Dieter Zander argues, “It can’t be about how many you converted this week or bound to the latest evangelistic five-step strategy. We are not interested in becoming a megachurch. We are interested in getting as close as we can to following Jesus.”⁴⁴³ The point for Zander and others is not the size or growth of the church, but on faithfully reflecting Jesus Christ and following him. Jesus is then the centre of ministry rather than the church. What the emerging church “draws [people] with is what it draws them to.”⁴⁴⁴ The emerging church wants to ensure it only draws people to Christ, not to a church building or a program. Brian McLaren remarks that if the church has “anything to say at all, if it has a message that is worth repeating at all, then at the core it is Christ.”⁴⁴⁵

Second, in the Christ-centred mission of the emerging church, Jesus is the one who directs and accomplishes the ministry. Jesus is the one who accomplishes the mission of God, not the church. The church is a participator in the mission but does not own the mission of God. This is a crucial shift in the emerging church: to resist the self-centered colonizing tendencies of humanity. Lesslie Newbigin writes:

It is of the greatest importance to recognize that it remains [Jesus’] mission. One of the dangers in emphasizing the concept of mission as a mandate given to the Church is that it tempts us to do what we are always tempted to do, namely to see

⁴⁴¹ McNeal, *The Present Future*, 11–12

⁴⁴² McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian*, 156.

⁴⁴³ Dieter Zander quoted in Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 128.

⁴⁴⁴ Cole, *Organic Church*, 95.

⁴⁴⁵ McLaren, “The Method, the Message, and the Ongoing Story,” 201.

the work of mission as a good work and to seek to justify ourselves by our works. On this view, it is we who must save the unbelievers from perishing.⁴⁴⁶

In essence, it is easy to slide from being a partner in mission to being the savior and receiving the self-affirming benefits that being a savior brings. But for the emerging church this slide must be resisted because God's mission remains Jesus' mission. Neil Cole aptly writes, "In many of the churches in the West, ministry is done *for* Jesus but not *by* Jesus – and therein lies the *big* difference."⁴⁴⁷

For the emerging church Jesus is the focus and the actualizer of ministry. The emerging church does not do ministry for Jesus; Jesus only does the ministry of healing and reconciliation. Mark Yaconelli writes, "Once we admit that we are powerless to turn [people] into Christians we can recognize that ministry is a series of small acts of trust."⁴⁴⁸ While Yaconelli is speaking out of a youth ministry context, he clearly shares the ethos of the emerging church. The emerging church is invited into a trust relationship with Jesus' missional activity. The emerging church simply seeks to be obedient to Jesus, allowing him to work through them to accomplish his mission. Neil Cole gives this advice for emerging leaders planting churches, emphasizing the necessity to trust Jesus with his mission:

Stop being concerned about whether 'your' church plant will succeed or not. It isn't yours in the first place. Your reputation is not the one on the line; Jesus' is. He will do a good job if we let him. If we have our own identity and reputation at stake in the work, we will tend to take command. Big mistake. Let Jesus get the glory and put his reputation on the line; He can take care of Himself without your help.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁶ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluarlist Society*, 117.

⁴⁴⁷ Cole, *Organic Church*, 54 (emphasis original).

⁴⁴⁸ Yaconelli, *Contemplative Youth Ministry*, 72.

⁴⁴⁹ Cole, *Organic Church*, 206.

In summary, the emerging church's mission is centred on Jesus rather than the church. Jesus directs the mission, and does the ministry for the emerging church. The mission of God, as centred in Jesus, clearly directs the ministry of the emerging church.

Conclusion

The mission of God directs the ministry of the emerging church. First, the emerging church has a ministry that is both communal and relational as shaped by God's mission. Second, the mission of God directs the ministry of the emerging church by directing its scope for ministry involving the whole person. The emerging church is therefore involved in politics, the environment, and economics, because the salvific call of God encompasses each area of life. Third, the mission of God directs the ministry of the emerging church to be Jesus focused and enabled. Therefore the emerging church's ministry is shaped and directed by God's mission.

Mission Based in Love

The mission of the emerging church is based in love. Mission can only flow out of love; God is love, and so his mission is a mission of love. Steve Taylor, of *Graceway Church*, writes, "A relational Trinity that leaks love means the emerging body of God is also called to be a love-leaking community. This becomes the essence of holiness. It is not a separation from society but the integration of unique love within society."⁴⁵⁰ The emerging church seeks to leak love in all spheres of life and to be a place of integration of God's unique love within society. Quite simply, for the emerging church, "To be born of God is to be born of love."⁴⁵¹ The very nature of God, his mission, and atoning work is

⁴⁵⁰ Taylor, *The Out of Bounds Church?*, 109.

⁴⁵¹ Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 71.

love.⁴⁵² Love for humanity compels God to action. Therefore love is the central virtue, which defines the emerging church. Peter Rollins writes, “Being right, or having right doctrine or theology, must never trump love. Any theology that accomplishes full knowledge or makes accessible the mysteries of the world and is not loving is as useless as the sound of pots banging together.”⁴⁵³ Mission based in love trumps knowledge and doctrine, not because knowledge and doctrine are inconsequential, but because without love they become oppressive. Love not only propels God’s mission but also protects it. Without the “active love for, and presence of the radical Jesus, Christianity easily degenerates into an oppressive religion.”⁴⁵⁴ Therefore the emerging church practices a mission based in love because God’s mission compels love, and is protected by love. The love-based mission of the emerging church works out practically in a variety of ways as demonstrated below.

The emerging church practices loving the different, the unlovable, and those in the margins as a practical outworking of God’s love-based mission. God’s love must compel the bearers of his love to cross boundaries, and reach the unloved, and the different. John Caputo, a postmodern theologian, writes, “It is no great feat, after all, to love the loveable, to love our friends and those who tell us we are wonderful; but to love the unlovable, to love those who do not love us, to love our enemies – that is love.”⁴⁵⁵ For the emerging church love is only truly practiced when it is given to enemies, to the

⁴⁵² While some theories of atonement, such as the penal-substitutionary atonement, emphasize the wrath or holiness of God, for the emerging church love is still the central motif in atonement. For a full discussion on emerging church theories related to atonement based in love see the excellent book *A Community Called Atonement* by Scot McKnight.

⁴⁵³ Pagitt, “The Emerging Church and Embodied Theology,” 131.

⁴⁵⁴ Frost and Hirsch, *Re.Jesus*, 73.

⁴⁵⁵ Caputo, *On Religion*, 13.

unlovable, and to those in the margins. Love given to the unlovable must be consistently practiced in real ways.

Several examples illustrate the point. In Sean Stillman's friendship with Muslims he is "prepared to engage them for the long haul" and hope that the love and grace of God speaks through his presence.⁴⁵⁶ Stillman seeks to earn the right to speak by his unconditional loving attitude that is consistently practiced. Shane Claiborne, in his practical loving of those in the margins, practices solidarity with them. For Claiborne and those in his community, unjust laws were being enacted that prevented the homeless from sleeping in parks. To practically demonstrate love and solidarity for those in the margins Claiborne and his community slept over-night with the homeless in New York City resulting in their arrest. Out of love he identified with the homeless and helped to change their situation. After being arrested and prosecuted he won a civil suit of wrongful arrest and was awarded \$10,000, and important legal precedent for the poor. He spent the money on the poor, creating a giant theo-drama in front of Wall-Street enacting out the year of jubilee giving money away, and by sending one-hundred hundred dollar bills to churches and leaders with the word love written across it. Love in action.⁴⁵⁷ For Claiborne love must be made real by loving the unlovable, standing up for those in the margins, and giving grace to the different.

Claiborne's practices are echoed in the belief of Kenny Mitchell of *Tribe*, New York. He expresses the need to love the unlovable and the forgotten:

Unless the widow is being taken care of, we are not following Christ. The basic ingredients of the gospel are not fused in our life if we are not purposefully aware of what is going on in our neighborhood. We believe that Christ is all about single moms and drunks. Therefore, as a church, we must be socially and politically

⁴⁵⁶ Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 129.

⁴⁵⁷ See Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution*, 186–87 and 281.

aware. To be authentically spiritual, we have to be engaged in what Jesus talked about.⁴⁵⁸

Love, for Mitchell, Claiborne, and the emerging church, must reflect Christ, be the centre of mission, and be made real for those living in the margins of society. John Caputo writes, “God pitches his tent among beings by identifying with everything the world casts out and leaves behind.”⁴⁵⁹ The emerging church can do no less but pitch its tent among those who have been cast out and left behind, reaching out to them in love.

Along with loving the unlovable and those in the margins, mission based in love is seen in the relational focus of the emerging church. For the emerging church programs have value, but cannot supersede relationships where love is generated and given. Programs “will never replace people who love a person over the long term.”⁴⁶⁰ For the emerging church mission based in love is actualized in committed relationships that demonstrate the active love of the church. Doug Pagitt gives an illuminating reflection:

When churches think through who they are and who they want to be, they face a choice: Do they create programs for the people who are there or for the people they want to attract? We tried to avoid that choice altogether. Instead we asked who we were and what we had to offer one another.⁴⁶¹

The point is not programs but to ask what relational resources Pagitt’s people have to give one another. For Doug Pagitt, and the emerging church, the focus is on relational giving love rather than focusing on programming.

The goal for the church is to reflect the radical love of the Kingdom of God in its relationships and church culture. Brad Cecil writes, “We have the feeling that God wants us to create a culture that is kingdom-like so that in that culture the poor, the widows, and

⁴⁵⁸ Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 141–42.

⁴⁵⁹ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 45.

⁴⁶⁰ Carrasco, “A Pound of Social Justice: Beyond Fighting for a Just Cause,” 256.

⁴⁶¹ Pagitt, *Reimagining Spiritual Formation*, 131.

the orphaned are cared for, the hungry are fed, the children are safe, and the community lives in peace.”⁴⁶² For Cecil and his church *Axxess*, the point is whether or not the love of Christ is having an impact at a relational level; it is not whether the programs are working but the whether the people are cared for.⁴⁶³ Kester Brewin points out that, “Love will not be stunned into us, and we must resist the temptation to make church a spectacle, to put on visual feasts or sensational healings and blow people’s minds and lead them mindless into the pews.”⁴⁶⁴ Instead, love is slow-grown over time, through the rhythms of life, rather than through programs. The point for Brewin is that love cannot be manufactured; instead it must be generated over time through faithful presence. Therefore the purpose of the church is not to provide flashy programs but to engage in relationships. Love cannot be forced, only given space to grow. For the emerging church, God’s love-based mission primarily creates a relational focus of love and then, if necessary, programs that operate out of love.

The emerging church seeks to practice a mission based in love by being generous. If the mission of God is loving, then it must be one that demonstrates love in generous giving. The generous giving of the emerging church is practiced both inside the church and within the community. For Tim Bach and his church community, generosity may be practiced by paying mortgages and bills for one another in the community.⁴⁶⁵ The leadership intentionally takes less money home so that it can be given out. Tim Bach and his church is an example of generosity within the church community, whereas the *Eden Project* is an example of hospitable generosity to those in the greater outside community.

⁴⁶² Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 147.

⁴⁶³ Brad Cecil says, “We don’t measure our success by how many people attend our staged events but by how God-like the culture is.” Cecil quoted in Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 147.

⁴⁶⁴ Brewin, *Signs of Emergence*, 137.

⁴⁶⁵ Bach, “Gener8: Session 1.”

The *Eden Project* is centered in an area of Manchester with the highest crime rate in Europe. Those who are a part of the *Eden Project* consistently open their homes, invite neighbors in, and become centers of generosity, which has made a tremendous impact.⁴⁶⁶ Generosity as an expression of a loved-based mission is being creatively explored in the emerging church. Anna Dodridge's community is opening up space at night to provide tea, shelter, and generosity in action to clubbers.⁴⁶⁷ *Solomon's Porch* owns a van that is available for anyone at anytime.⁴⁶⁸ Generosity is being practiced in creative and loving ways to demonstrate the loving mission of God. Peter Rollins writes, "True love gives without regret and without strings."⁴⁶⁹ The emerging church is generous as a practical outworking of God's mission, creatively giving its time, resources, and love.

In summary, the mission of God is based in love. The very nature of God's mission is loving, and is practically shaping the emerging church's expression of love. Rather than being "concerned with rational justification, the quintessential epistemological stance of a postmodern culture is 'show me'."⁴⁷⁰ The emerging church is doing just that by showing love to those in the margins in practical ways, by having a relational rather than a programmatic focus, and by being generous in creative ways. Peter Rollins inspirationally summarizes the ethos of love as found in the emerging church. He writes:

To affirm the approach [of love] that I am advocating means that we must accept that to be a Christian is to be born of love, transformed by love and committed to transforming the world with love. This is not somehow done by working ourselves up and trying to find the right way of thinking and acting, but rather in letting go and opening up to the transformative power of God. In so doing, we

⁴⁶⁶ Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 141.

⁴⁶⁷ Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 143.

⁴⁶⁸ Pagitt, *Reimagining Spiritual Formation*, 106.

⁴⁶⁹ Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 69.

⁴⁷⁰ Keesmaat and Walsh, *Colossians Remixed*, 24.

will not merely sit around describing God to the world, but rather, we will become the iconic space in which God is made manifest in the world.⁴⁷¹

In short the emerging church seeks to respond to the God, by being transformed by his love, and then being a missional vessel of his love to the world.

Mission as Faithful Relationships

The emerging church is committed to faithful relationships as characterized by God. God is a faithful God. God enters into relationships faithfully committing to them. Mission too then must entail the loving commitment characterized by God. Mission, if it is godly, must be faithful in terms of its commitment to people, its sustaining love, and its depth. The faithful, missional presence of God has shaped the emerging church's conception of mission and its activity. It is very concerned about longevity and faithful presence within relationships. Carl Rashke writes, "for Christians the power of our God lies in his power of relationship, or the power of establishing, sustaining, and pursuing relationships."⁴⁷² The power of God, according to Rashke, rests in his purposeful creation of relationships that are sustained over time. The emerging church responds to the essential personal nature of God by focusing on faithful relationships as an expression of their relationship with God. Such faithful relationships are evidenced in differing ways. First, leadership roles are based by faithful relationships rather than institutional authority. Second, the emerging church's role in culture is based in faithful relationships as spiritual guides. Third, the emerging church evaluates its success through a faithful, missional evaluative criterion. The key point is that the emerging church, reflecting the nature of God, enters into faithful relationships for mission.

⁴⁷¹ Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 71.

⁴⁷² Raschke, *GloboChrist*, 19.

Faithful Relationships within Leadership

The emerging church's leadership model is centered on faithful relationships. Leadership within the emerging church has shifted from positional or institutional authority that is conferred on an individual or group, to authority placed within an individual or group based on actions. Authority is placed in those who have *consistently* demonstrated wisdom, obedience to Christ, and authenticity thereby garnering authority.

Brian McLaren links the shift in emerging church leadership to culture writing:

As we move beyond modernity, we lose our infatuation with analysis, knowledge, information, facts, belief systems – and with those who traffic in them. Instead we are attracted to leaders who possess that elusive quality of wisdom . . . who practice spiritual disciplines, whose lives are characterized by depth of spiritual practice.⁴⁷³

Authority is not based on information or knowledge, now that information has been widely dispersed. Instead leadership is based in those who can correctly apply and live life in relation to their connection with God. For this style of leadership to occur committed relationships both to God and to the community of believers is needed.

Leadership within the emerging church is about allowing relationships proven over time to determine authority, influence, and leadership.⁴⁷⁴ Neil Cole writes that authority and “leadership that rests on title is weak.”⁴⁷⁵ He continues writing, “Authority does not rest in the position but in the hearts and minds of those who choose to respect and follow.”⁴⁷⁶

Therefore for the emerging church leadership is not defined by positions, but by respect, wisdom, and relationships. In this sense leadership is based upon faithful relationships

⁴⁷³ McLaren, “Missing the Point: Leadership,” 160.

⁴⁷⁴ Kester Brewin writes, “It is about an open dedication to understand that each of us has a contribution to make . . . over time the connections and associations that are positively reinforced over time will become established in the memory and collective consciousness . . . There will no longer be a single external authority to which people look for truth, but rather a distributed network of authorities that people look to in order to assimilate multiple perspectives on truth.” Brewin, *Signs of Emergence*, 110–111.

⁴⁷⁵ Cole, *Organic Church*, 79.

⁴⁷⁶ Cole, *Organic Leadership*, 176.

because wisdom, and respect cannot be generated or demonstrated quickly. Instead wisdom must be applied consistently over time to gain leadership, which results in respect.⁴⁷⁷ Therefore the emerging church has developed its leadership along relational lines that emphasize faithfulness to each other and Jesus Christ. This is in direct contrast to authority as based on position, as in the modern church.⁴⁷⁸ Leadership and authority are developed through relationships bound in community and faithfulness.

Leadership as based upon community and faithfulness can be seen practically in a number of emerging churches. For Ian Mobsby's church *Moot* having a non-hierarchical leadership structure based on faithful relationships is biblical. He says, "It starts with an understanding of the Trinity as a community of mutually inclusive and serving components of God. There is no hierarchy."⁴⁷⁹ For Mobsby, and *Moot*, God is the model for leadership. Since God exists in a non-hierarchical community that is faithfully committed to one another, this is their model and their aspiration. For Kester Brewin and *Vaux*, leadership implicitly is based on faithful relationships because leadership is based on gifting. Since leadership is based on gifting it presupposes having committed relationships with those in the community to be able to discover and discern gifting.⁴⁸⁰ Not only is leadership based on gifting but also on service and faithful commitment for *Vaux*. Kester Brewin writes, "*Vaux* has no specified leadership, it does have an unspoken trust/merit system where more weight is bound to be given to the ideas of those in the group who have shown consistent commitments and have a track record of good

⁴⁷⁷ Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 201–203.

⁴⁷⁸ Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 150–51.

⁴⁷⁹ Ian Mobsby quoted in Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 194.

⁴⁸⁰ Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 199.

output.”⁴⁸¹ Therefore central for *Vaux* is faithful relationships to both the church, and others for leadership. As Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger summarize, “In many emerging churches, leadership is implicit rather than explicit. In other words, leaders emerge naturally through the recognition and affirmation of the community.”⁴⁸² For leaders to emerge from such a structure requires faithful commitment to the community otherwise one will never generate the needed respect and affirmation. For the emerging church leadership must be practiced in faithful relationships as modeled by God.

Faithful Relationships within Culture

The emerging church’s role within culture is based upon faithful relationships, so as to partner with God in his mission. Relationships are the venue through which mission occurs. Therefore the nature, length, commitment, and depth of relationships are vital to the emerging church. The necessity for faithful relationships and their implementation can be demonstrated in how the emerging church missionally relates to the larger community. It relates in a faithful missional approach to the community through being “spiritual tour guides” to those both inside and outside the emerging church. Steve Taylor, explaining the nature of ‘spiritual tour guides,’ writes:

The mission of the church is to act as a resource for spiritual tourists. The church must search for ways to move people from *recreation* to *experimentation* to *existential* relocation into the kingdom of God. We can do that by acting as tour guides on the spiritual journey.⁴⁸³

Emerging churches are becoming spiritual guides helping “spiritual tourists” not only to experience but to enter the kingdom of God. People within the emerging church are

⁴⁸¹ Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 201.

⁴⁸² Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 203.

⁴⁸³ Taylor, *The Out of Bounds Church?*, 85 (emphasis original).

acting more as gurus and less as professors, taking a relational role to evangelism and spiritual direction.⁴⁸⁴

Practicing faithful relationships is key to being an effective “tour guide” or guru for the emerging church. First, the tour guide must have a faithful relationship with God. Rob Bell writes, “perhaps we ought to replace the word *missionary* with *tour guide*, because we cannot show people something we haven’t seen.”⁴⁸⁵ Therefore a true tour guide must have a faithful relationship with God to be able to guide the individual or community into an encounter with God in a safe and personal way.⁴⁸⁶ Second, the tour guide must have a faithful relationship with a faith community. The life of faith cannot be lived in an isolated fashion; therefore for true mission to occur with spiritual tourists, the tour guide must be grounded in a long-term community of faith. Third, the tour guide must have faithful relationships with the spiritual tourists. The goal of spiritual guides is to help others navigate the depths of God. Navigating the depths of God requires time, patience, and a sensitive spirit, and these things do not develop instantaneously but over a long term. Doug Pagitt writes, “Friendship is more than being friendly. Friendship means vulnerability, risk, struggle, and pain. It means welcoming the ‘other’ and the familiar . . . it means time.”⁴⁸⁷ For the emerging church, becoming friends with others, and being a spiritual guide, takes time, faithfulness, and love. Since God is love, love must characterize the faithful relationships of his guides. Love is not “a bargain, but unconditional giving; it is not an investment, but a commitment come what may.”⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁴ Reggie McNeal argues for a similar style of relationships by using the metaphor of being a personal trainer in spiritual growth. McNeal, *The Present Future*, 76–80.

⁴⁸⁵ Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, 88.

⁴⁸⁶ Taylor, *The Out of Bounds Church?*, 86.

⁴⁸⁷ Pagitt, “A People of Hope,” 19.

⁴⁸⁸ Caputo, *On Religion*, 4.

Being a spiritual tour guide, as Taylor puts it, requires commitment not only to God but also to others. Love cannot be seen as an investment for the future, but instead a commitment to the relationships in the present. Only when love is characterized by faithfulness, can a spiritual guide truly reflect God and thereby lead another into the presence of God.

Faithful Relationships as Evaluative

Along with practicing faithful relationships both inside the church and in culture, the emerging church also uses faithful relationships as an evaluative criterion for its missional activity. The emerging church whole-heartedly believes that God's mission requires faithful relationships. Therefore the emerging church seeks to evaluate itself along faithful-relational lines rather than numeric lines. As quoted above, Brad Cecil writes, "We have decided to measure by other means, such as, how long do relationships last? Are members of the community at peace with one another? Are relationships reconciled?"⁴⁸⁹ The emerging church measures its success through its relationships, i.e., whether they are being faithfully sustained, rather than simply looking at numeric growth. The key question for emergents is whether or not they are connected in deep and faithful relationships to those both inside and outside the church.⁴⁹⁰ Sherry and Geoff Maddock write, "We find that success, after all, is best measured by faithfulness not by outcomes."⁴⁹¹ Outcomes, conversion, and growth are the responsibilities of God. The emerging church is simply called to be faithful in the relationships it has, and the mission it was given. The rest is up to God. Faithful relationships then become the benchmark for mission and ministry within the emerging church.

⁴⁸⁹ Brad Cecil as quoted in Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 99.

⁴⁹⁰ Halter and Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom Primer*, 7.1–7.7.

⁴⁹¹ Maddock and Maddock, "An Ever-Renewed Adventure of Faith," 87.

Conclusion

In summary, the emerging church practices faithful relationships in response to the mission of God. Within its structure the emerging church has elevated relationships that are based on faithfulness. In its posture to the culture the emerging church practices faithful relationships to others, to God, and towards its church community. Lastly the emerging church evaluates its practice through faithful relationships, which demonstrates the importance that faithful relationships have within it.

Mission as Multiplication

God's mission is supposed to multiply and expand across the earth. The multiple organic parables (Matt 13:1–29; and Mark 4:26–34) hint at the capacity of God's mission to naturally reproduce and multiply. Alan Hirsch writes, "all organic life seeks to reproduce and perpetuate itself through reproduction."⁴⁹² The church is no exception. Neil Cole writes, "We need a new form of church that can be fruitful and multiply."⁴⁹³ The emerging church is committed to becoming that new form of church that is poised to become a spontaneous multiplication movement. The emerging church is more concerned with multiplication than with addition.⁴⁹⁴ The emerging church demonstrates a missional multiplication focus through focusing on disciples, by becoming "liquid," and lastly, by not planting replicas.

The multiplication ethos is seen in the emerging church's practice of discipling.

Neil Cole writes:

⁴⁹² Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 212.

⁴⁹³ Cole, *Organic Church*, 92.

⁴⁹⁴ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 65.

If we cannot multiply churches, we will never see a movement. If we cannot multiply leaders we will never multiply churches. If we cannot multiply disciples, we will never multiply leaders. The way to see a true church multiplication movement is to multiply healthy disciples, then leaders, then church, and finally movements – in that order.⁴⁹⁵

For the emerging church multiplying churches begins with multiplying and growing disciples. A shift that “Jesus invites us to make is from producing to growing.”⁴⁹⁶ The focus is not on “producing” churches but allowing God’s Spirit to grow and reproduce disciples.⁴⁹⁷ Disciples become a clear focus for the purpose of reproduction. Alan Hirsch, a key practitioner and theologian in the emerging church, writes:

If the heart of discipleship is to become like Jesus, then it seems to me that a missional reading of [the Great Commission] requires that we see that Jesus’ strategy is to get a whole lot of little versions of him infiltrating every nook and cranny of society by reproducing himself in and through his people in every place throughout the world.⁴⁹⁸

The clear purpose of discipleship within the emerging church is reproduction. Disciples are to create disciples *ad infinitum*. For the emerging church the point is to start small, recognizing the power that is inherent within each and every believer because of Jesus Christ. Multiplication must “start small and seemingly insignificantly, but with time and generational reproduction it reaches a global level of influence.”⁴⁹⁹ Global influence, through reproducing disciples who multiply, is the goal of the emerging church.

The emerging church has moved to a more “liquid” structure for multiplication. Mission requires multiplication yet it is very difficult to multiply large complex structures. In order to reproduce, the emerging church has adopted a more fluid structure.

⁴⁹⁵ Cole, *Organic Church*, 93.

⁴⁹⁶ McKinley, *This Beautiful Mess*, 64.

⁴⁹⁷ See below for a discussion on the difference between “producing” (replicating) and “growing” (reproducing).

⁴⁹⁸ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 113.

⁴⁹⁹ Cole, *Organic Church*, 104.

Pete Ward writes, “We need to let go of a static model of church that is based primarily on congregation, programs, and buildings. In its place we need to develop a notion which, like NT ecclesia, is more flexible, adaptive, and responsive to change.”⁵⁰⁰ The emerging church is developing a more flexible “liquid” structure, so as to allow it to better respond, adapt, and multiply.⁵⁰¹ The only way in which culture will be changed, disciples grown, and lives transformed is for the church to be open to the culture surrounding it; being ready to contextualize for mission and adapt for understanding. *Stadia* is a network-based church that practices this liquid form of church so as to multiply. *Stadia* regularly seeks to develop and deploy network church multiplication leaders who are open to culture and fluid enough to adapt and respond. They are currently planting churches, reproducing disciples, and raising leaders.⁵⁰² Other examples within the emerging church is the *Church Multiplication Associates* led by Neil Cole who has articulated an organic, decentralized, and flexible movement to allow maximum multiplication.⁵⁰³

Lastly, the emerging church functions with a missional multiplication mindset that allows for change and creativity. Much church planting in the past has often more closely resembled cloning, rather than the natural reproductive process.⁵⁰⁴ Often the daughter church is a replica of the mother church. The emerging church, though, has a radically different approach that is better suited to the task of multiplication. Flowing

⁵⁰⁰ Ward, *Liquid Church*, 44.

⁵⁰¹ Kester Brewin writes, “The church is not an independent, closed organism that has all the resources it need for its own indefinite survival. We are host by a culture and in order to survive in that culture . . . we must open ourselves to it and adapt to it. We can have absolutely no chance of shaping it unless we can sense and respond to it, and this means adapting our interfaces, our ‘ports’ if you will, to allow free transfer each way.” Brewin, *Signs of Emergence*, 101–2.

⁵⁰² See www.stadia.cc and Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 205.

⁵⁰³ Cole, *Organic Church*, 26–29.

⁵⁰⁴ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 212.

from a natural reproductive understanding, and an appreciation for the dynamic creativity inherent within the cosmos, it engages in heterogeneous church multiplication. The new churches that are generated from the emerging church are not replicas in terms of structure and practice but in terms of values. The emerging church is more concerned with multiplying churches, than it is concerned about reproducing forms and structures. In short, the emerging church plants different and diverse churches that inhabit and interact with the diverse culture that surrounds them.

Steve Taylor explains that a key value is “sampling.”⁵⁰⁵ Sampling is the process by which various smaller pieces are assimilated and created into a new whole. In reference to church multiplication it means that aspects of a variety of different churches are combined with creativity to envision a new church. There is a certain resemblance to the churches or practices that were sampled, but not replication. In essence, sampling allows for creative reproduction that does not end up with replication. A church such as Saddleback could not be launched as a replica. A church replica would need millions of dollars, large plots of real estate, and thousands of members to be launched. But if replication is not the goal, but reproduction, then multiplication can truly occur. Sampling as a value allows the emerging church to create contextualized churches. The emerging church is geared towards missional multiplication by focusing on reproduction rather than replication.

In summary, the emerging church believes that for mission to occur multiplication must follow. Reproduction is a natural force within life, and must be seen within the church. Leaders are to grow leaders. Churches are to grow churches. Disciples are to grow disciples. Emerging churches now see themselves “as strategic parts of an organic

⁵⁰⁵ Taylor, *The Out of Bounds Church?*, 137–55.

rhythm of witness. Some might exist for only a season, others might stay as an entity for generations, but the goal will be to reproduce, not just to sustain itself.”⁵⁰⁶ The missional multiplication focus can be seen in the emerging church’s focus on multiplying disciples. The missional multiplication focus can also be seen in the fluid and flexible form of church being pioneered by emergents so as to remain adaptable, current, and able to multiply within their contextualized setting. Lastly, the missional multiplication focus of the emerging church can be seen in its appreciation and desire to reproduce rather than to replicate. Emerging churches do not desire to become megachurches;⁵⁰⁷ instead emerging churches desire to raise up disciples and multiply as the result of God’s missional calling upon them.

Mission Involving Everyone

The emerging church involves each person in ministry as God’s mission calls for active involvement of each Christian. A missional understanding of God results in a compelling calling for each believer to be involved in the mission of God. There are no non-participants in the family of God. The emerging church recognizes theologically that mission must capture each person. Scot McKnight summarizes:

To be forgiven, to be atoned for, to be reconciled – synonymous expressions – is to be granted a mission to be a reciprocal performer of the same: to forgive, to work atonement, and to be an agent of reconciliation. Thus, atonement is not just something done to us and for us, *it is something we participate in – in this world, in the here and now.*⁵⁰⁸

Atonement, an aspect of God’s active mission, compels both acceptance and participation. For the emerging church to be atoned for or forgiven entails one’s

⁵⁰⁶ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 67.

⁵⁰⁷ “Emerging churches have no desire to grow big.” Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 110.

⁵⁰⁸ McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, 31–32 (emphasis original).

reciprocal participation and cooperation with God in his mission. Forgiveness entails action and atonement necessitates participation.

The praxis of the emerging church reflects its belief in the necessity for all Christians to partner with God in mission. The leadership structure and worship encourage full participation by members, in the emerging church. Within the community the expectation is that each member is a missionary wherever they find themselves and therefore must be missionally involved. The emerging church then both inwardly, in terms of its leadership and worship, and outwardly, in its conception of each person being a missionary, encourages and expects full participation in the mission of God.

Full-Participation in the Church: Leadership and Worship

The emerging church encourages the active involvement of each member through its structure and worship. It practices a diffused leadership model that encourages involvement. Its worship services and style also demonstrate its belief in the necessity of participation.

The emerging church functions by having a de-centralized and organic leadership model that ensures active participation of each member within the church. The development of its leadership is directly influenced by its desire to involve everyone in the mission of God, and to remove obstacles to partnering in God's mission. Modernity's leadership style was dominated by hierarchical structures often resembling the business world around the church.⁵⁰⁹ This style of structure left power consolidated at the top end of the structure, rather than with the people, which inhibited action and participation. This

⁵⁰⁹ Phyllis Tickle notes that this leadership style finds its historic roots in the church patterning itself after Reformation style nation states. Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 107.

style has been inverted within emerging churches. Ryan Bolger and Eddie Gibbs summarize this characteristic:

In a nonhierarchical community, all members help make decisions and take turns leading, actions that serve as a counter to the control and oppressive tendencies of modernity. For the emerging church, the key challenge is to dismantle all systems of control and to reconstruct a corporate culture according to the patterns of the kingdom.⁵¹⁰

Emerging churches specifically seek to create their leadership models that reflect God, his kingdom, and his inner dynamic. Miroslav Volf writes, “The structure of Trinitarian relations is characterized neither by a pyramidal dominance of the one nor by a hierarchical bipolarity between the one and the many, but rather by a polycentric and symmetrical reciprocity of the many.”⁵¹¹ For Volf the inner dynamic of the Trinity models full-participation and giving. Volf writes, “The symmetrical reciprocity of the relations of the Trinitarian persons find its correspondence in the image of the church in which all members serve one another with their specific gifts of the Spirit in imitation of the Lord and through the power of the Father.”⁵¹² Emerging churches seek to design and construct leadership along Trinitarian and kingdom lines that not only encourage participation but also expect it.

To accomplish this enabling of the community they often dismantle traditional power structures. By purposely not having a central leadership structure and programming, they encourage communities to connect, grow, and program in a grassroots and organic fashion.⁵¹³ Peter Rollins suggests removing the central leadership required to

⁵¹⁰ Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 194.

⁵¹¹ Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 217.

⁵¹² Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 219.

⁵¹³ See Peter Rollins post on his intentional leaderless structure, which encourages the community to give relationally, pastorally, and create organically. Rollins, “Developing Uncaring Leadership Structures in the Emerging Community,” no pages.

perform certain functions, such as managing tithes, and pastoral support to enable and encourage mission. He writes:

In this model there is no ecclesial centre, rather everything takes place around the circumference. . . . This means that each person involved in the community must take responsibility to give of their time and money to those both outside and within the community itself. With this type of approach it is not possible to hide behind some institutional structures, for each individual is required to take the responsibility, which, in the first model, was demanded from the central leadership.

The diffused leadership of Rollins' model specifically focuses on removing the obstacle to missional activity, which in this case is the ecclesial centre that both demands action and then controls it. Rollins, through his diffused leadership model is seeking to create an impetus for each member to take responsibility for the mission of God in their own lives; specifically in the areas relating to blessing (tithing) and caring.

A diffused leadership creates space for others to use their gifts. Kester Brewin comments, "The Emergent Church must allow people to bring their gifts and share them at every level of its ministry."⁵¹⁴ Si Johnston of *headspace* in London explains how this has occurred in practice, and the shift it takes to move towards full participation:

We, as a leadership, have emphasized maximum participation but found that week after week the leadership team had to accept full responsibility for services. We were talking about participation but not facilitating it structurally. This was consumer church with an alternative worship gloss. Now, after a year, we've cancelled one of the fortnightly leadership meetings and have decided to have a community-planning meeting where we plan services and talk 'church and mission.'⁵¹⁵

Full participation is the goal of the emerging church and through its leadership it is structuring itself for participation. God's call is upon each person individually and

⁵¹⁴ Brewin, *Signs of Emergence*, 161.

⁵¹⁵ Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 211.

communally to participate and partner in his mission. Therefore the emerging church encourages each person to participate through its chosen diffused-leadership model.⁵¹⁶

The emerging church's physical worship space style actively encourages full participation and interaction from the members. Jim Belcher writes, "God calls everyone, not just the people up front, to participate in worship. This is not a lecture or a concert. As priests, we are all required to be involved. There are no spectators."⁵¹⁷ This belief in the intrinsic participatory nature of worship has led to changes in the form of worship and the space itself within emerging churches. Dan Kimball notes that most modern church buildings are not built for participation or innovation, but simply for information giving.⁵¹⁸ For the emerging church the worship space itself must communicate that worship is fully participatory. Changes within the "worship space" itself are common in emerging churches, moving to more circular seating, café space, or free form space in reaction to the traditional lecture style space of modern and traditional churches.⁵¹⁹

Concomitant with the changes in the space there have been changes in the sermon. Some churches, such as *Solomon's Porch* and *Journey*, have turned to "progressional implicative preaching" rather than a traditional sermon.⁵²⁰ Progressional implicative preaching is dialogue based rather than monologue based. The sermon is presented in a narrative form that expects participation, interaction, and even course correction from the body of believers. Since all believers have both knowledge and gifts of the Spirit, they are encouraged to add to the sermon, thereby co-creating it in the process. The sermon is then not static, but a vibrant reflection of the community that it

⁵¹⁶ Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 191–92.

⁵¹⁷ Belcher, *Deep Church*, 139.

⁵¹⁸ Kimball, *Emerging Worship*, 90–91.

⁵¹⁹ See for examples: Collins, *small fire*, no pages; and Pagitt, *Reimagining Spiritual Formation*, 52–53.

⁵²⁰ See Pagitt, *Preaching Re-Imagined*, 23–24.

inhabits. The sermon presented through a processional dialogue approach is a change that allows for the active participation of the congregation.

Along with changes in the sermon, worship has become more diverse to allow for greater participation by members with differing gifts. Dan Kimball writes, “We now see art being brought into worship, the use of visuals, the practice of ancient disciplines, and the design of the gathering being more participatory than passive-spectator.”⁵²¹ Each member is encouraged to actually contribute to the worship gathering. Whether that contribution is through active participation within a communal experience, such as *ikon’s* theo-dramas or *Vintage Faith’s* communal prayer stations; or through actively adding to the service through painting, bringing a prayer station; or even contributing a piece of poetry, each member is actively encouraged to be a part of the service.⁵²² Doug Pagitt explains the services at *Solomon’s Porch*:

Our worship gatherings almost feel like great improv. The band plays from memory, not from sheet music, and the sermon is created as it comes, not read from a written text. Some may spontaneously share a brand-new poem or song. Communion is introduced by a different person each week, and there’s no set script.⁵²³

While there certainly is a lot of fluidity within *Solomon’s Porch*, the key point is that the entire structure is geared towards involvement.

Different emerging churches may have different levels of spontaneity, but each church focuses on involving its members. Todd Hunter comments, “the only way [people] received the benefit of the service was through participation, not through

⁵²¹ Kimball, *Emerging Worship*, 5.

⁵²² For *ikon’s* theo-dramas see Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 77–137; for *Vintage Faith’s* communal prayer exercises see Kimball, *Emerging Worship*, 188–92; for other service descriptions see Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism*, 143–46.

⁵²³ Pagitt, *Reimagining Spiritual Formation*, 136.

detached observation.”⁵²⁴ Participation in the service leads to transformation. The worship service itself is designed to promote participation within the emerging church. The space, sermon, and worship all communicate that God’s mission involves each and every person. The leadership and worship services of the emerging church express its belief in the necessity for each person to be involved in the mission of God. They “do not allow anonymous consumers to continue consuming. Rather, in short order, they become active participants.”⁵²⁵ Rather than pandering to spiritual consumers they create spiritual producers, who actively participate in the mission of God. The emerging church in both its leadership and worship demonstrate that participation encompasses all believers, in God’s mission.

Full Participation in the Community: Each Member a Missionary

The emerging church believes that each Christian must be missionally involved in the community. Not only is the expectation to be involved within the leadership and worship of the church, but to be involved in the community at large. The understanding is that each member is a missionary to the world. Lesslie Newbigin, writes, “The exercise of priesthood is not within the walls of the Church but in the daily business of the world.”⁵²⁶ Anna Dodridge, echoes Newbigin, writing, “It’s all mission. . . . We are definitely all missionaries and evangelists. There are some who are more gifted for this stuff or have more of a focus on it, and they are the people who encourage and lead us in these areas, but we’re all involved.”⁵²⁷ Each and every person is to be involved in mission beyond the walls of the church. As Mark Driscoll helpfully points out, the focus is not to

⁵²⁴ Todd Hunter quoted in Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 159.

⁵²⁵ Bolger and Gibbs, 138.

⁵²⁶ Newbigin, *The Gospel in the Pluralist Society*, 230.

⁵²⁷ Anna Dodridge is a leader at *Bournemouth* in the U.K. Anna Dodridge quoted in Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 58.

have a mission of community but a community of mission.⁵²⁸ Each and every person must be missionally involved wherever he or she find himself or herself. Rob Bell, pastor of Mars Hill in Grand Rapids, Michigan explains, “The goal isn’t to bring everyone’s work into the church; the goal is for the church to be these unique kinds of people who are transforming the places they live and work and play because they understand the whole earth is filled with the *kavod* [(glory)] of God.”⁵²⁹ The focal point is not on the church building and programs, but on the church (the body of believers) being missionally involved in all aspects of life. Mission must capture each Christian to serve holistically. Ryan Bolger and Eddie Gibbs summarize, “Full participation is not just for the church service. It is for the church’s service to the world.”⁵³⁰ The expectation and encouragement within the emerging church is to be missionally involved in the community, partnering with God in his service to the world.

For the emerging church, full participation is encouraged because God’s mission encompasses work and life that occurs in the secular sphere. Therefore each and every person’s daily life matters. Mission is not just connected to church ministry, but instead, to life. Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch explain:

If a businessman attempts to use his influence to develop ethical schemes through his business to serve the needy to create jobs for the unemployed we traditionally don’t see this as mission. We don’t see the strong creation of friendship that parents make through the local school as being anything to do with mission (unless they’re inviting them to church). We can’t see the regular gathering of surfers at their local beach as part of the net that catches people in the kingdom of God.⁵³¹

⁵²⁸ Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformission Rev*, 32.

⁵²⁹ Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, 85.

⁵³⁰ Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 169.

⁵³¹ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 45.

This disconnect as to what is true mission is changing in the emerging church. One's daily life and the relationships, daily connections, and actions can all be missional. By pushing the boundaries of what is deemed as "mission" to include the everyday decisions each person makes, rather than programs connected to a church, the emerging church encourages each person to take part in mission. The work, relationships, and actions one takes part in seven days a week are the soil for mission for each and every person. Mission is not relegated to professionals, but to those who profess and practice belief. Each believer in his or her sphere of influence is to serve; the mission of God is for each and every person to partner in.

Specifically, the actualized mission of the emerging church has led to action. The expectation that each member is a missionary has transformed areas of people's lives in the community surrounding emerging churches. *Tribe*, in Hollywood, sees itself called to serve in a missional way within the community with foster kids whose parents have AIDS. Others with a passion for film went to Kosovo to make a film to raise awareness of the situation there. Still others, as a result of their desire to be missionally involved in all areas of life, gather food to take downtown in Los Angeles.⁵³² Brad Cecil asks these key questions, "Are the poor fed? Is the crime rate down? Are the widows cared for? Does the hospital have enough volunteers? Does the community have public transportation? Is art supported? Is beauty valued? Are people educated?"⁵³³ These questions, central to *Axxess* and Cecil, reveal that at the heart of the emerging church's conception of life is the conviction that their presence should have a missional impact in the community. Each and every member is to be serving wherever they are and this leads

⁵³² Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 143.

⁵³³ Brad Cecil quoted in Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 147.

to care for widows, food for the hungry, and the appreciation of beauty. The moment a person comes to Christ, serving, mission, and participation with God are expected. Each new “convert is a new worker – immediately.”⁵³⁴ Therefore each new worker should catalyze a new outward example of mission. No matter what context a specific believer is from, mission should be found and furthered there. In this sense it is impossible to have a “secular” job. If you, “follow Jesus and are doing what you do in his name, then it is no longer secular work; its sacred.”⁵³⁵ The work is not secular but made sacred by the very nature of God’s mission. Mission is to characterize each person in their outward activity in the community because it is sacred work. The emerging church is about actively partnering with God in his mission, which encompasses all people, encouraging them to join and partner with His work. No one is exempt for the calling to actively pursue God’s mission in each sphere of his or her life. *Conclusion*

As seen above the emerging church, both inwardly, within its leadership and worship, as well as outwardly with its position that each member is a missionary actively encourages the full-involvement of each Christian. God expects that each person will be missionally involved both within the church and the community. This expectation is being met in the emerging church.

Summary

The church acquires its existence because of God’s mission. The church is both a product of mission and an instrument of God’s mission in the world. God’s mission must shape ecclesiology. The mission of God must set the agenda, manner, and impetus for

⁵³⁴ Cole, *Organic Church*, 149.

⁵³⁵ Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, 85.

mission within a church. Therefore for any ecclesiology to be deemed positive it must be demonstrably missional.

The preceding examination focused on evaluating the emerging church in terms of its congruence with God's mission. Through the evaluation it is clear that the emerging church is missional. The emerging church allows God's mission to direct its ministry. The ministry of the emerging church is communal and relational, holistic, and Jesus-centred. The emerging church's mission is based in love, and having faithful relationships as modeled by God. The emerging church demonstrates its missional nature by focusing on multiplication. Lastly the emerging church encourages total involvement in God's mission. In summary, the emerging church practices and believes in a missional ecclesiology. Therefore the emerging church is both advantageous and beneficial. The missional nature of the emerging church demonstrates that it allows its ecclesiology to be shaped by God's mission. The fact that the emerging church is missional and incarnational (as demonstrated in chapter three) constitutes a foundation for the positive nature of the emerging church.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The church within the Western world has been misunderstood and pushed to the edges of society. In general many people's opinion on the church is based upon the idea that the church is an organized religion dominated by a political agenda, focused on opposition to homosexuality, driven by dominant male individuals with a negative posture, and filled with a judgmental attitude.⁵³⁶ Rob Bell and Don Golden write, "When God invites the people to be priests, it's an invitation to show the world who this God is and what this God is like."⁵³⁷ The emerging church seeks to be an accurate representation to the world by being recalibrated by Jesus Christ to reflect his light and love to a postmodern society. Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch summarize in this way, "Mission is the spark, the catalyzing energy, that makes sense of everything the church was intended to be."⁵³⁸ The "being" of the church is under reexamination as the emerging church aligns its ecclesiology with mission and Incarnation. The emerging church is seeking to regain its rightful place within society by first putting Jesus at the centre and letting mission shape its actions. The church is "by definition a call . . . for renewal."⁵³⁹ There currently is a renewal of incarnational and missional life under the emerging church.

This thesis examined the emerging church in terms of both its theology and ecclesiology to demonstrate its positive and advantageous nature. This examination occurred through a three-fold process. Firstly the emerging church was defined and set within its proper context. The emerging church is a diverse ecclesiological movement. It does not have a central leader, or theological statement. Its diversity is reflected within its

⁵³⁶ Kimball, *They Like Jesus But Not the Church*, 79–89.

⁵³⁷ Bell and Golden, *Jesus Wants to Save Christians*, 31.

⁵³⁸ Frost and Hirsch, *ReJesus*, 181.

⁵³⁹ Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct*, 35.

developmental roots. It has developed at different times, and different speeds across the globe coming to a level of prominence within the past ten to fifteen years. The development of the emerging church has happened as individuals and communities began to interact with postmodernism, to be affected by their personal praxis, and out of protest to certain areas within the traditional evangelical church. While the development of the emerging church is clearly complex and diverse there is a central ethos that does define it. The emerging church is centrally a postmodern envisioning of faith. It is post-individualistic combining an appreciation for both individual and communal aspects of life. It is also post-rationalistic recognizing the importance of reason but does not subsume all other types of thinking to reason. It is post-noeticentric believing that holistic knowledge is important. The emerging church is also post-dualistic appreciating the holism of life. Lastly the emerging church is post-attractional, and post-conversional meaning that it focuses on mission and multiplication.

Second, the theological basis for evaluating of the emerging church was introduced and explained. The theological evaluation of the emerging church was based upon two key integral theological concepts: the Incarnation and God's mission. All ecclesiology for it to be both positive and advantageous must be shaped by God's self-revelation in the person of Jesus Christ, and by his mission. Therefore a theology of the Incarnation and a theology of mission were developed to provide the appropriate foundation for a comprehensive evaluation of the emerging church. The theology of the Incarnation emphasized that all ecclesiology must be both simultaneously revelatory of the person of Jesus Christ, and participatory with Christ. In this sense the emerging church to be positive must be incarnational. The emerging church must reflect and

participate in Jesus Christ to be advantageous. Not only must the emerging church be incarnational but also missional to be deemed valuable. The emerging church must allow God's mission to shape and structure its practice and ecclesiology. Therefore if the emerging church is demonstrably missional and incarnational it can be deemed positive. To examine the emerging church principles were derived from the Incarnation and God's mission that could then be used to assess the emerging church. This theological evaluation is important as it evaluates the motives and purposes of the emerging church rather than just its contextual practices. In this way this evaluation can remain conclusive across a broad spectrum of practices by focusing on the principles that drive the emerging church's ecclesiology and theology.

Third, the principles that were derived from the Incarnation and God's mission were then applied to the emerging church to demonstrate whether it was incarnational and missional. The emerging church in both its praxis and thought was demonstrated to be incarnational. It is focused on going, on having a posture of openness, servanthood, and obedience. As well the emerging church engages in close proximity relationships. Lastly the emerging church contextualizes and identifies with others as a result of its understanding of the Incarnation. The emerging church was conclusively demonstrated to be incarnational. Along with being incarnational the emerging church is missional. It allows God's mission to shape its ministry. It enters into faithful relationships that are based in love. And lastly it seeks to multiply and involve everyone in God's mission. The emerging church is missional recognizing that it is both an instrument of God, and a witness to the power of God. This examination has resulted in clearly demonstrating that

an incarnational theology and missional praxis has shaped the ecclesiology of the emerging church.

The emerging church can now be said to be a positive development within the current culture because of its missional and incarnational ecclesiology. It has been clearly demonstrated to value incarnational theology and to put it into practice within its ecclesiology. The same can be said for a missional understanding of theology and ecclesiology. The emerging church is shaped by both an incarnational and missional theology. Being missional and incarnational is positive, not because of its pragmatic results, but because it is biblical. An ecclesiology that is not shaped and patterned after a missional-incarnational understanding is a weak ecclesiology. Therefore the emerging church is strong ecclesologically, and a positive development as it is both incarnationally and missionally structured for a postmodern, pluralistic society.

While this thesis primarily examined the emerging church in terms of its underlying ecclesiological and theological convictions other avenues of criticism and inquiry regarding the emerging church remain open for further investigation. The relationship between the emerging church and the church at large remains a key concept and does deserve further inquiry. How the emerging church relates to other ecclesiological forms, ecclesiological tradition, and the majority world is important for study. As well the communitarian perspective of the emerging church is another valuable area of discussion. The emerging church believes in a truly communal perspective, which is valuable for a society that is moving from individualism towards a more communal reality. Therefore a discussion of a theology of community from an emerging perspective is worthwhile. Along with these positive areas of inquiry, there are also potential areas of

concern and possible criticism of the emerging church. An investigation into areas of potential concern including the emerging church's views on specific theological concepts such as homosexuality and salvation, along with its depth of cultural identification would be fruitful both for critics and proponents of the emerging church. While this thesis' conclusion is definitive, there are clear areas of further study in relation to the emerging church.

In summary, the evaluation of the emerging church has proceeded along a three-fold progression. First, the nature, values, and ethos of the emerging church were discussed to provide the context for the discussion. Second, the evaluative criteria were discussed and their biblical basis examined. Third, the emerging church was evaluated along missional and incarnational lines demonstrating that it is both missional and incarnational. Therefore the emerging church is a positive development within the worldwide faith, specifically for a postmodern culture. The emerging church is pioneering a missional and incarnational response to the pluralistic society that surrounds it. While the shape and structure of much of the emerging church movement is diverse; there is clear unity on the necessity to be both incarnational and missional. It is the missional and incarnational aspect of the emerging church that makes it such a positive force within the world. The emerging church incarnates Christ as it goes out into the world seeking to partner with God wherever they find him working. The emerging church adopts a posture of Christlikeness seeking to minister in love, grace, humility, and from a position of weakness rather than power. Emergents get close to others, cross boundaries, and push past prejudice to incarnate the Good News in contextualized ways. The emerging church also identifies with those whom they are reaching out to. The

incarnational approach of the emerging church leads to a Jesus-style, and Christ-centred ministry. It gets combined with a missional mindset, which poises the emerging church to make a significant impact. The ministry of the emerging church is mission-directed, based in love, and evaluated by love and faithful relationships. It seeks to both multiply, involve each person, and send them out incarnationally, following the mission of God. For these reasons the emerging church, in terms of its theology and ecclesiology, is a positive development within today's current culture. It is poised to incarnate the gospel in a missional way to a postmodern world, seeking to bring the hope of Jesus into each and every community.

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