

REIMAGINING CHURCH LEADERSHIP FOR THE CANADIAN CHURCH IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup>  
CENTURY FROM THE DOCTRINE OF THE INCARNATION

by

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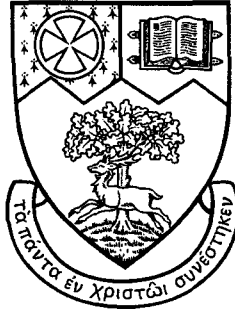
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## **Abstract**

“Reimagining Church Leadership for the Canadian Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century from the Doctrine of the Incarnation”

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In a post Christendom Canada, the church finds itself in a place where it must turn to the biblical witness and discern theologically about the course of the church in an ever changing society. This thesis explores passages that speak about the incarnation such as John 1:14, and the Christ Hymn in Philippians (Phil 2:6-11) and points out that the incarnation is a testimony of the missional nature, and work of God. This thesis also expands upon this point to develop an understanding of how the church today can be described as incarnational. The remainder of the study is devoted to understanding the critical role of leadership in cultivating an incarnational church, and developing the incarnational leadership model needed for it. The model explores what it means for a leader to live incarnationally, and provides a framework for how it shapes their life, ministry and congregations.

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## Introduction

The 21<sup>st</sup> century represents a time of significant change for the Canadian church. It has been well documented that over the past century the Canadian church has been in transition, moving from a former position of prominence to a position of marginalization in society.<sup>1</sup> For some this trend is a positive development for the church, as a move to the margins represents a better location for the church to live into its true identity and perform its ministry.<sup>2</sup> For others the trend represents something bleak: the failure and demise of the church in Canada. Regardless of the outlook, the theories concerning why this is happening, and what could have been done to stop it have been quickly piling up. While no one would propose that the answer is simple, one topic that is consistently part of the discussion is the role of leadership in the church. The question that is often brought forward is, "what is wrong with our current outlook on church leadership that brought us to this place, and how should it be changed?"<sup>3</sup> As many writers and church leaders have begun to reflect on the response of the Canadian (and in general Western) church to the shifting landscape in society, there is an emerging consensus that the key issue is not developing new cutting edge strategies in order to be with the times. Rather, at the core of the discussion is the need to find a theological, and a scripturally sound basis for what God is calling the church and its leadership to at this juncture in history. This must be accompanied by courage to evaluate our present practices and what should

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<sup>1</sup> Grant, *The Church in the Canadian Era*, 240. Grant describes the church as having a significant impact on the direction of the nation, yet he concludes that by 1987 it is "a little more than memory" and that "the life of the nation proceeds as if they (the church) did not exist."

<sup>2</sup> The missional church movement writers would be the main advocates that the move away from Christendom is a positive. See Frost, *Exiles*, Gulder et al. *Missional Church*. for two good examples.

<sup>3</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 165. The authors state that leadership is essential for the church to shift into a new model, especially in the transition from infancy to maturity.

and should not be retained. In other words, what is needed is an appropriate biblical model for leadership that can function effectively in the context that the church finds itself today.

### **The Changing Place of Christianity & the Church in Canada**

The past half-century has seen a dramatic shift in the role of the church within Canadian society. In Canada's first 100 years, from the time of confederacy onward, the nation was regarded as not just a democratic one as it is today, but as a Christian one. As astonishing as it may sound to some of our younger citizens, the influence of the Christian faith in the everyday lives and social fabric of the nation was very strong. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century in many regions of the country the church was either heavily involved, or took the reins entirely for the responsibility of social organization. In Newfoundland the churches ran the school system. In Quebec, town life was centered on the local parish of the Catholic Church. Throughout Ontario, each denomination found communities where they could form roots, such as the Lutheran Church in Waterloo County, where German-speaking settlers from Pennsylvania and Germany came. Even in the sparsely settled region of Western Canada, the church viewed the land as a mission field to become Christianized.<sup>4</sup> This heavy involvement came about because many denominations, despite their differences, had a similar vision in which Canada was to intentionally be built into Christendom.<sup>5</sup> Into the 20<sup>th</sup> century the church took the role of providing the

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<sup>4</sup> Please see Grant, *The Church in the Canadian Era*, 2–9. For a survey of the church across the lands that would become Canada around the time of confederacy. Grant also details some of differences between various regions, and sub-regions and their relationship between denominations. Though the church maintained an influential role in most situations, some areas such as Montréal had a more distant relationship.

<sup>5</sup> Grant, *The Church in the Canadian Era*, 26.



moral backbone for society seriously, and intended to influence culture through social work, and even university education in a movement known as revivalism.<sup>6</sup> At this time the church experienced a period of great influence in society and the vast majority of the public was involved in the life of the church. Even as recently as 1945 a Gallup poll revealed that 61% of Canadian adults attended a religious service within a seven day period, and in 1961 an astonishing 96% of the country identified themselves as Christian (47% Roman Catholic, 49% Protestant).<sup>7</sup> In fact, this post WWII era was a time when many denominations peaked in total membership, and were building more churches to accommodate their growth.<sup>8</sup> During this period a majority of the population was still supportive of Christian morals dictating the laws of the land. For example, in 1950 the Ontario legislature made it acceptable for sporting events to be held on Sunday. During the five years that followed, there were more public votes cast to oppose this change than support it.<sup>9</sup> While the relationship between church and society was not always harmonious or genuine this brief look into the past reveals how central the church once was in Canadian culture.

Over the past 50 years however, the church has been quickly pushed to the margins and away from its position as the primary spiritual, moral, and communal hub of

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<sup>6</sup> See Christie and Gauverau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*, 133–64 for an in-depth dialogue on the church and social work in the early twentieth century.

<sup>7</sup> Bibby, *Beyond the Gods and Back*, 10–11, 16. The post WWII era was considered statistically speaking, a thriving point for the church. The 65% attendance figure can be further broken down where 83% of Catholics and 45% of Protestants would attend a religious service regularly.

<sup>8</sup> Bibby, *Beyond the Gods and Back*, 11. One such example would be how the United Church built approximately 1500 new churches and church halls between the mid 40's and mid 60's. Another would be that the Anglican Church peaked at a million members in this time.

<sup>9</sup> Grant, *The Church in the Canadian Era*, 166. It is important to note that the post WWII era marked a time when many Christendom values were fading, but this illustration is being used to point out that as recently as 50 years ago the value of Sabbath was preferred to no Sabbath to some degree by the majority of the population. It is also important to note that there were periods in Canada's first one hundred years when support for the church was thinner. Grant cites the depression as one of these times.

the country. Perhaps the most obvious proof of this point is found in the attendance figures from Sunday services. Since the peaks of the 1960s, weekly attendance of 60% has dropped dramatically to 30% by 1975, and 25% by 2005.<sup>10</sup> What is even more revealing are the splits between, pre-baby boomers, baby boomers, and post-baby boomers as shown in Table 1. Many analysts such as Reginald Bibby have correctly pointed out that the boomers are directly linked to the drop in attendance.

**Table 1.** Weekly Attendance with Demographic Splits for 1975 & 2005.<sup>11</sup>

	<b>Canada</b>	<b>Quebec</b>	<b>Elsewhere</b>
<b>1975</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>29%</b>
PRE-BOOMERS	37%	48%	33%
BOOMERS	15%	11%	16%
<b>2005</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>28%</b>
PRE-BOOMERS	37%	33%	37%
BOOMERS	18%	7%	22%
POST-BOOMERS	24%	13%	28%

It is during the time that the first Boomers reached their twenties that the severe decline in national church attendance becomes noticeable. Even when observing the 2005 numbers, the national attendance numbers are spiked by a higher attendance from the Pre-Boomer generation. What this means is, that statistically speaking, attendance might not have reached its lowest levels. Even though there is an increase in attendance among Post-Boomers in comparison to Boomers, the overall attendance figure is still buoyed by the high attendance of Pre-Boomers.

<sup>10</sup> Bibby, *Beyond the Gods and Back*, 4.

<sup>11</sup> See Table 2.1 from Bibby, *Beyond the Gods and Back*, 17. The data is summarized by Bibby here, though the source data comes from his Project Canada 1975 and 2005 works

However, attendance numbers only tell half the story; the other question is does the rest of society still take its values, and moral beliefs from the church, or has that too been replaced? In short, most of the cultural, spiritual, and moral influence the church held on society has eroded over the past 50 years. Canada as a nation began to develop into a welfare state as the government began taking on more and more of the social welfare responsibility that was previously held by the church, limiting its influence and leadership in that field.<sup>12</sup> Eventually, the majority of politicians began to strive to create a “new” Canadian image that is more inclusive, and less connected to its Christians roots. One early example would be the conscious decision by Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson’s Liberal government to introduce the maple leaf as Canada’s national symbol, a uniting object without any allusion to Christianity.<sup>13</sup> At the time there were many members of the public and politicians alike who wished for a Christian symbol such as a cross to be included on the flag. Those propositions were ultimately turned down because the government wished to have a symbol that might spark a new Canadian identity characterized by its diversity across religions and ethnicities. What might be most telling of the Christian recession from the public sphere is an examination of the values of 21<sup>st</sup> century Canadians. A poll asking teenagers if they have a “belief in God or a higher power” has shown that teenagers answering, “no, I don’t think so” rose from 9% in 1984, to 17% in 2005. Similarly, those who answered, “no, I definitely do not” rose from 6% to 16% in this time. This means that 33% of teenagers do not believe in a higher being

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<sup>12</sup> Miedema, *For Canada's Sake*, 26. The church would dramatically loose its influence in education, health care, and welfare. This hardest hit was Roman Catholic Quebec where this relationship was formerly stronger than amongst Protestant churches.

<sup>13</sup> Miedema, *For Canada's Sake*, 42–45

whatsoever.<sup>14</sup> Another example asks Alberta residents if they have spiritual needs, and if they believe those needs are being met. For those who answered that they have spiritual needs, and do not attend religious services the survey reports that 74% believe their needs are being met.<sup>15</sup> Without going into depth about what those spiritual needs are, this statistic suggests that a significant portion of Canadians who have never had contact with the church believe they are doing just fine without it. Simply put, Canada is shaping into a nation where Christianity just does not matter that much in the daily lives of the general public.

Confronted by these dramatic shifts, many in the Canadian church (and the Western church in general) have made it a priority to find out what the church should do in order to regain prominence in society.<sup>16</sup> However, it is the belief that the church, and Christendom must be restored to a former glory, and the staunch resilience to change which is the real failure of the Canadian church during the changes of the past century. The first point to note is that the demise in Christendom, and the growth of secularism, postmodernism and pluralism should not be viewed as a great evil that is nothing else than a spiritual assault on the church, and the Kingdom of God.<sup>17</sup> There certainly were benefits to Christendom: the church had more freedom and support from society to share the gospel message, and more people would look to the church, and to God for various avenues of help. There were also negative aspects of Christendom that have hindered the

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<sup>14</sup> See table 3.7 from Bibby, *Beyond the Gods*, 49.

<sup>15</sup> Bibby, *Beyond the Gods*, 124. The survey also reveals that 95% of those who do attend services weekly report that their spiritual needs are being met. Bibby also reports other notable groups such as not religious and nor spiritual, as well as not spiritual but religious.

<sup>16</sup> See Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 21–41. for a description of the broadly defined term “Western Culture” as it pertains to Western Europe, and North America. This chapter also contains an insightful, and influential summary on Post Enlightenment thought, and its interaction with Christianity.

<sup>17</sup> See Van Gelder, “Missional Context” for a description of postmodernity as it relates to the church. pages?

ministry of the church more than helped it, as well as positive developments that have surfaced as a result of the changes in society. The gospel message had the potential to be easily lost within a certain institutional or national message by the people bearing the message.<sup>18</sup> Hunsberger also comments that Christendom has mislead the church to equate itself with the reign of God, and that the more successful it was, the more God's Kingdom would be advanced on earth.<sup>19</sup> When it comes to some of the cultural shifts with Canada, a positive aspect could be that the door is opened for the church to connect with many new cultures of people, through the immigration that has been made possible by a country willing to welcome people of a new background. On a different front, technology and loss of traditional community structures have left many hungry for community, something that the church could look at as an opportunity for the gospel message. This is really the tip of the iceberg of this discussion, and it is picked up again in this thesis. At this point, it is sufficient to point out that church needs to be open to revaluation and rediscovery.

However, instead of recognizing the changes that have occurred in Western society, and taking the time to understand these changes, and pray into new revelation and insight for how the church transform itself, too many resources and too much time has spent on pushing for Christendom ideas. For example, a lot of effort has been placed into keeping Christian morals as the pacesetters for Western values in both Canada and the United States. This includes everything from the battle for prayer in public schools, and debates over the teachings of evolution.<sup>20</sup> In another area, this idea is illustrated by

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<sup>18</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 83.

<sup>19</sup> Hunsberger, "Missional Vocations, 99.

<sup>20</sup> Van Gelder, "Missional Challenge," 55.

some churches who have goals towards becoming large and influential. The commercialism, and materialism that is brought into church culture as a result of these emphases fosters a different type of Christendom. The church is treated like a corporation, and different churches can actually be considered as different “brands,” and church members are encouraged to support their church so that the church can then impact the rest of the community, and grow its membership and reach.<sup>21</sup> The point here is not to completely dismiss all of these approaches, but to draw attention to the reality that we live in a post-Christendom society, and anyone expecting to move back towards Christendom will be disappointed. If the church believes that it can recapture something similar to Christendom then it will fail to discover how God is calling it into mission today, and how it can reach out with the love of Christ into its community. This is why there has been so much attention given as of late to understanding the calling of the church in a post-Christendom society.

### **The Importance of a Biblical Church Leadership Discussion**

There has been a considerable amount of literature written over the past decades from Christians in Canada and other Western countries about what the church needs to do in such times. Individuals are coming forward to add their thoughts from all corners of the faith, regardless of denomination, tradition, or even the size of the church they come from. Many come forward aspiring to provide a vision for the church, and its leaders to pursue. A vision, that if properly carried out, could lead to churches successfully seeing lives brought into the kingdom of God, and despite the changing society, growth in

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<sup>21</sup> Van Gelder, “Missional Challenge”, 65.

numbers and even influence in their communities. One approach that many have taken is to look to industry or business for models of strategic planning and leadership organization.<sup>22</sup> This approach focuses on finding and utilizing strategies that can help the church become more effective and successful at accomplishing its mission. Another entirely different conversation takes the issue in another direction. Instead of discussing how the church and its leaders could make operational improvements such as packaging the music better, or updating the interior design, proponents aim to uncover core biblical and theological truths concerning the very nature of church, and what is required to lead it.<sup>23</sup> This approach uses a biblical and theological framework to formulate a vision for leadership in our current context.

In keeping with this second approach this thesis aims to contribute to the discussion on 21<sup>st</sup> century church leadership. As useful as it might be to develop new strategies, and even adapt church practices to become more relevant to society, the priority must be to develop a sound biblical and theological foundation. The missional church movement, for example, utilizes this principle for the basis of their proposals. Specifically, they have taken the task of examining scripture seriously to reevaluate our understanding of Christianity and the church against the background of Western culture. One of the primary concerns they have raised is that the ministry and identity of the church in Canada, the United States, and Western Europe is dominated by the Western Christendom worldview. Their approach is to determine which values in the traditional North American model could be considered as deviations, or at the least incomplete

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<sup>22</sup> Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 16.

<sup>23</sup> Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 16. Concerning the nature of the church, Van Gelder states “understanding the nature of the church is foundational for being able to clarify the purpose of the church.”

reflections of the example given by scripture, and search for scriptural truths that need to be further explored. Their investigations have been insightful towards reimagining the nature and ministry of the church, and finding meaning for the church outside of the Christendom formula.

This thesis will aim to contribute to this discussion by focusing on what type of a biblical leadership model is needed in the church today, while keeping the discussion primarily focused on an application within the Canadian setting. Leadership is an important topic within this conversation of the changing church. However a church decides to respond to the changing context and whatever direction a church ultimately goes, leaders play an important role for casting vision, calling the congregation to respond in a united manner, and even providing the necessary support that is needed.<sup>24</sup> However, while literature has begun to emerge, there is still a significant amount of work that is left to be done.<sup>25</sup> The missional church movement is still relatively new. Incredibly the book *Missional Church* considered as the landmark work to initiate the dialogue, is only 15 years old.<sup>26</sup> Overall, the discussion on how leadership fits into the missional picture has only recently begun to pick up in pace.<sup>27</sup> The other issue that is a focal point of this thesis is the Canadian situation. At this moment there is not much literature that presents a biblical model for leadership with a Canadian audience specifically in mind. There are important similarities with Canadian culture, and that of the United States, and

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<sup>24</sup> Mancini, *Church Unique*, xxii

<sup>25</sup> See Van Gelder et al, *The Missional Church and Leadership Formation*, for an early resource on missional leadership.

<sup>26</sup> Van Gelder and Zscheile. *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 1.

<sup>27</sup> Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 122. In this book, Van Gelder does make the clear distinction that even though leadership is the supporter and shaper of ministry, it must be rooted within the call and nature of the church in such a way that the model of leadership flows from the value of the church.



Europe, but there are some remarkable differences as well.<sup>28</sup> While our theology must be drawn, and informed primarily from scripture, it is still the task of the pastoral theologian to have their biblical theology interact appropriately with their culture. Therefore, while there will be some discussion regarding the Western church in a general manner, the goal is to remain focused on Canada as much as possible.

### **Thesis and Methodology**

This thesis will present an incarnational leadership model as a biblically grounded vision for the leadership of the 21<sup>st</sup> century church in Canada.<sup>29</sup> This model will be rooted in a biblical theology of the incarnation. It will specifically hi-light the ideas that leaders are called to be immersed in their cultural context, and capable of creatively guiding the church body in participating in God's mission. Further, the thesis will illustrate how some of the challenges facing the Canadian church can be addressed by this form of leadership because it calls for leadership by immersion. This approach invites leaders to identify with the people they are leading and with the Canadian culture in which they reside in order to lead with and among the people the leader is called to serve.

In order to successfully present an incarnational leadership model this thesis will be required to take a look at the core meaning of the incarnation, expand on how it applies to the church, and church leadership and then answer how congregations might be positively shaped by adopting an incarnational leadership model. This thesis will lay out a biblical theology which reveals how the incarnation speaks about the missional nature

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<sup>28</sup> An exploration of these differences lies outside the boundaries of this present work.

<sup>29</sup> In this thesis when we say that the church is incarnational we are not suggesting that the mystery of one individual (Jesus) as both fully human and fully God is replicated in the church and/or Christians. It is a missional statement, in the same way Jesus was able to dwell among humanity, so should the church.

of God. The focus will be on identifying how, for the biblical writers, the doctrine of the incarnation was primarily a declaration to the audience about the full life of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>30</sup> It is a declaration that recognizes how God chose to dwell among humanity in our fallen state in order to fulfill his redemptive plan. The next important idea that will be explored is the concept that the church is to live incarnationally. There are two arguments that fuel this concept. The first is that God's missional activity has not stopped with Jesus' ascension. Rather, it continues because the Holy Spirit dwells in each individual believer guiding the church into mission. The reason is that the incarnational life of Jesus is meant to serve as a model or inspiration for how the church is called to live. Both of these reasons will be critical to the discussion regarding the incarnational church. The next central point will emphasize how leaders are going to be required to be incarnational in order for the church to fulfill an incarnational calling. This point will explore how leaders are called to personally connect themselves with their community in order to build relationships, and reveal God's glory in that community. It will also discuss how leaders can think about developing an incarnational habit, and we will offer some ideas for how to get started. Finally, this thesis will also explore how an incarnational leadership model is not something that can be simply appended to current leadership approaches, but rather how it is an entirely new approach to church leadership in Canada. An incarnational model demands a new perspective on the priorities of leadership, and what leaders are called to focus on. It also informs what is maybe less relevant to focus on, providing a more descriptive picture of the scope of Incarnational leadership. This

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<sup>30</sup> Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 309–11. Grenz argues this position from the two main passages concerning the doctrine (Philippians 2:5–11, John 1:1–18). The incarnation for understanding God's identity in Jesus of Nazareth is meant to draw upon his full life including the death and resurrection. It is this life that reveals the divine glory witnessed by those around him (John 1:14).

thesis will explore these shifts while bringing the conversation back towards answering how the incarnation is an important leadership model for 21<sup>st</sup> century church leadership.

The task of this thesis is one of practical theology. To undertake this project the specific methodology that will be utilized comes from Derek Tidball's *Skillful Shepherds*. The foundation for this approach is that the theology of scripture is what shapes and forms the ministry of the pastor in a healthy direction.<sup>31</sup> For this thesis to follow this method, the driving force must be the examination of how scripture can illuminate the task of ministry.<sup>32</sup> In this case the specific subject is leadership for the Canadian church in a post-Christendom society. The primary way that this topic will be addressed is through a literature based research methodology. The sources that will be examined will include both primary and secondary sources. The key primary source that will be utilized is the biblical text, specifically the New Testament writings. While the theme of the incarnation can be traced throughout the entire biblical narrative, it is more prominent within the New Testament. Secondary sources that will be utilized include commentaries, theology texts, and practical theologies that interact with selected passages. This means that the analysis for this thesis will come from examining research that has already been done by others.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, in my analysis I will be pulling together, and critically interacting with the various sources in order to establish a model which illustrates what incarnational leadership will look like.

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<sup>31</sup> Tidball, *Skillful Shepherds*, 24.

<sup>32</sup> Tidball, *Skillful Shepherds*, 7. This is evident in one of Tidball's primary questions "do the Scriptures and theology give any insights into how the pastoral task is to be conducted?"

<sup>33</sup> Chadwick et al., *Social Science Research Methods*, 259.

To follow the methodology that I have illustrated above I intend to develop a biblical theology of the incarnation as presented by the biblical writers of the New Testament, particularly the prologue of John (1:1-18), and the Christ hymn from Philippians (2:5-11). Both of these passages, will be examined exegetically with the use of commentaries and theology texts with the intention that the text may speak for itself concerning the incarnation instead of adjusting the meaning of these passages to fit a theological theme, and thus twisting the text from its original meaning.<sup>34</sup> This will form the contents of the first chapter. The next step of the methodology will consult writings on the missional church, and examine their theological insights on the incarnation, as well as on church leadership. The arguments made by these sources will be examined in light of the biblical theology of the incarnation that has now been developed. This is where secondary analysis comes into the discussion. I will be using these secondary sources to develop a deeper understanding of incarnational leadership by comparing their contents, a method known as *enlargement*.<sup>35</sup> I will utilize these sources because secondary analysis can provide a fresh perspective to the conversation on how the church has been understanding the necessary developments of leadership.<sup>36</sup> The goal is to assist the analysis of how the incarnation shapes the nature of the church, as well as an analysis of the incarnational leadership needed for the church. This approach is reflective of the methodology utilized by Charles Scobie.<sup>37</sup> His method emphasizes a connection between the task of biblical theology and practice and community of the church. It is this principle

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<sup>34</sup> Klein et al., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 170. This approach assumes that meaning is found in the text, and that the meaning is given by the author or speaker.

<sup>35</sup> Chadwick et al., *Social Science Research Methods*, 264.

<sup>36</sup> Chadwick et al., *Social Science Research Methods*, 262.

<sup>37</sup> Scobie, *The Ways of Our God*. 8. He advocates for an intermediate biblical theology which functions as a 'bridge' between the historical study of the Bible and the use of the Bible as authoritative Scripture by the Church.

that provides a vision for how the biblical witness does not limited itself to describing church leadership in the period of the New Testament, but can inform it for our current context as well.

## **Summary**

For this thesis, the inspiring thought that God's divine insight, found in scripture, can illuminate and stimulate a course for ministry and leadership in our current time is the driving force behind all that is written. While the church today may wrestle a lot with its place in the changing Canadian society, the biblical text provides some great insight for discovering God's call for the church. One of these calls is for an incarnational form of ministry, and an incarnational leadership model. After studying the meaning of the incarnation and discovering how vital it is for the 21<sup>st</sup> century Canadian church, especially its leadership, there is a need for this subject to be discussed more, and also acted upon. As it will be outlined through the next four chapters the incarnation had a very integral place within the life of the early church. It not only spoke about God's presence in the person of Jesus, but it spoke about God's continued missional presence within the church, and even brought understanding to the church for how they were called to step into God's mission in their own world. A significant goal of this thesis is to help further the conversation that incarnational living was not just for the church of the New Testament, but a call that is for the church of today in all corners of the world, Canada included. The reason being is that an incarnational approach to the church can help reshape its understanding of where it belongs in today's society. An incarnational approach can also help the church rediscover how to bring the gospel into a society that seems less and less interested in hearing the gospel. However, the real goal of this thesis,

and why it exists in the first place is because the role that leadership plays is going to be very critical to the Canadian church. An Incarnational leadership model brings leaders back into a position where they are present among their communities and able to meaningfully connect and engage with the people around them. This model has the ability to tune leaders towards having a greater understanding of the needs around them, and equally important, a framework for a Christ inspired response to those needs. It also helps the community to have an encounter, or taste of God's actual presence, because it exists in the church. Finally, an incarnational leadership model also orients leaders towards building up the entire body of Christ, so that each member may be able to take part in God's mission. Putting everything together, the vision is that an incarnational leadership model will be able to guide the post Christendom Canadian church towards a biblically grounded, yet relevant path towards reaching out into our neighborhoods. This thesis will aim to help make that vision a reality

## Chapter One: The Doctrine of the Incarnation

With the groundwork laid for understanding the environment that the Canadian church finds itself in, we now turn to the task at hand- developing an incarnational theology for Christian leadership. To many the incarnation may not seem to be a fundamental theological starting point for understanding the missional call of the church, or the formation of its leadership. After all, the formal statements of the incarnation found in creeds, confessions, or modern texts seem more centered upon understanding the nature of Christ, and how the human person, Jesus of Nazareth was the eternal God who descended to earth. In other words, incarnational theology seems primarily concerned with an event that has already occurred, and understanding the implication that it has on revealing Jesus as God. Evidence of this can be seen in the Chalcedonian Creed from the year 451 C.E. which is a foundational document for establishing the incarnation as a core doctrine of Christian faith.<sup>1</sup> The document carefully elaborates on how the Son has a dual nature, how he was coeternal before creation, and yet fully human upon birth from the Virgin Mary.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, theological texts such as Grenz's *Theology for the Community of God* will place the incarnation fully within a chapter, or section on Christology.<sup>3</sup> Given all of this tradition, how is it that the incarnation can be used as a building block for missional theology?

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<sup>1</sup> Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 306. Incarnational theology existed long prior to 451, Chalcedon simply represents the place where the theology became clarified and formalized.

<sup>2</sup> Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 62.

<sup>3</sup> See Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 306–26. For an example of how the Incarnation is positioned in a standard systematic text. It is worth pointing out that Grenz actually does discuss the Incarnation within a missional hermeneutic to explore how the Incarnation can be repositioned. See also Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 723–738, and Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 598–625.

The answer to this question is found when we begin to understand that we have long missed a significant element of the original intention of the biblical witness in describing the incarnation.

Before looking into the scriptures, it is worth understanding that the dominance of the incarnation in Christology comes from a specific historical context. The formation of the essence of the formal doctrine as we know it was birthed as a response to claims that Jesus was not divine. The nature of Christ was a point of contention and mystery throughout the time of the early church.<sup>4</sup> Was Jesus divine, or human, and if both how is this possible? These were the questions that were in existence. The tension built between those with different views eventually coming to a head with the claims of Arius, who would state that Jesus was simply another created being, and not coeternal with the Father.<sup>5</sup> To resolve the conflict the council of Nicaea was formed in the year 325 bringing bishops across the Roman Empire together to formulate an official view for the church. The result was the Nicene Creed, which summarized the nature of Christ, stating that Jesus was indeed fully divine. Within this discussion a number of key biblical passages were consulted in order to address the questions before the council. These passages included the prologue in John (1:1-18), and the Christ Hymn in Philippians (2:6-11). these texts had such relevance to the conflict and were able to speak into so effectively that it was fitting that they began to play a central role in defining the orthodox church's

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<sup>4</sup> Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 78, 182. The conflict over the nature of Christ is not limited to his divinity, or just with the rise of Arianism. Docetism, was a prominent view opposing the orthodox church in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century which denied the humanity of Christ. When the gospel interacted with Greek philosophy, immediately there was conflict with notions of a supreme being interacting with humanity.

<sup>5</sup> Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 184. Though without any formal universal confession, the majority of the orthodox church worshipped Jesus as God, and as Arius's teachings gained followers, and through the circumstance of Christianity becoming an imperial religion the issue needed to be resolved across the church.



theological understanding of the nature of the church. As disputes continued, the council of Nicaea was followed by further councils and additional creeds until 451, when the council of Chalcedon took place to bring consensus to the issue.<sup>6</sup> What resulted was a firm affirmation that Jesus of Nazareth was one person with both a divine and human nature. The Christology that came from Chalcedon drew heavily from the prologue of John, specifically how the Word became flesh (John 1:1). The council, desiring to protect the orthodoxy of the church, was interested in determining who Jesus was, by analyzing how God could possibly be human, as well as what happened at his birth.<sup>7</sup> Theologically speaking, the outcome was that the Chalcedon perspective of the Incarnation was focused on the event of the divine *Logos* uniting with human nature.<sup>8</sup> This hermeneutic of the Incarnation would come to dominate how it was discussed by the church for centuries. The reason being, that until this point there were no formal creeds or confessions that spoke of the incarnation as much as the Chalcedonian creed. While there is not enough space to outline and develop how this position of the Incarnation would later influence the church, a couple of examples worth mentioning would be Anselm's work on atonement in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and the formation of the *Kenosis* theory from Protestant scholasticism.<sup>9</sup> It is clear then that the current understanding of the incarnation while biblical, is tightly constrained by a specific historical context.

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<sup>6</sup> Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 300–2. The Council of Chalcedon in 451 marks the fourth ecumenical council, and confirms and expands on conclusions from the earlier councils, specifically details pertaining to the dual nature of Jesus.

<sup>7</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 730.

<sup>8</sup> Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 306.

<sup>9</sup> Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 371. Anselm discussed how the reality of humanity's fallen state required God to take on human form for redemption. While this thinking does touch upon mission, it is still heavily weighted in the nature of humanity, the nature of God, and atonement theology. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 307. The *Kenosis* theory is centered on the idea of Jesus emptying himself of certain divine qualities in the Incarnation such as omnipresence.

The battle over the true nature of Jesus shaped the doctrine of the incarnation and moved it squarely into the realm of Christology, however the real essence of the doctrine may be found elsewhere. The key as to why the incarnation serves as a foundation for missional theology can actually be found by looking more closely at the scriptures, and specifically at the message that was intended by the writers. When one examines passages such as the prologue of John, and the Christ hymn in Philippians, it is clear that as much as the writers are confessing who Jesus was, and how he came to walk the earth. They are also testifying as to why he came, and who he was during his time among humanity. It is this second part; how Jesus lived among humanity as an ordinary human being before dying on the cross that needs to be added to our definitions. Grenz highlights the transition that is necessary in our theology of incarnation by stating:

The foundation for this confession, Jesus is the incarnate one, is not limited to Jesus' birth. All of his life, including his resurrection as the confirmation of his claims concerning himself, indicates that in Jesus the Word has come in the flesh.<sup>10</sup>

If the Word becoming Flesh is truly a reference to the full life of Jesus then it opens the door for new insights and applications for incarnation theology. Suddenly the incarnation becomes a proclamation of God's presence coming directly into the human condition. It has ramifications for understanding how God is a missional God, but it also expresses how God chooses to bring forth his mission of redemption.<sup>11</sup> These implications will be fully developed in the second chapter, but first we must examine if Grenz's statement concerning the incarnation is indeed what is expressed in the biblical witness.

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<sup>10</sup> Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 311.

<sup>11</sup> See Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 228. For a short explanation of the Incarnation as it is understood within missional church literature. This topic will be the focus of chapter two in this thesis.

## **The Incarnation in John's Prologue (John 1:1-18)**

The prologue of John is the ideal place to begin considering what the biblical witness reveals about the incarnation as these eighteen verses have shaped the Christian doctrine of incarnation as much as any other. The meaning of the incarnation in the prologue requires some close exploration due to the gospel writer's heavy use of symbolism and chiasmic structures. A careful approach to navigating our way through the text and its symbols reveal that this text portrays the incarnation as the full life of Jesus.<sup>12</sup> The approach we will take will be to examine how this point is conveyed as the central theme of the passage, followed by a closer study of some of the key words and clauses that the author intentionally uses to build this central theme. As this is uncovered, additional attention will be given to how the gospel writer intended the readers to understand what it says about the mission of God in their own lives.

Looking at the prologue of the Gospel of John in its entirety, the message is clear that the Gospel writer is primarily interested in conveying the Word becoming flesh as the full life of Jesus present among humanity. Perhaps the best place to begin is by noticing the absence of many of the key details that cause us to associate the incarnation with the birth of Jesus alone. In John's gospel there is no mention of the virgin birth or how it functions in the birth of Jesus. In John nothing is reported on how this union of the divine and human came to exist.<sup>13</sup> Therefore the gospel writer must have an alternative

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<sup>12</sup> Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 5. Johannine symbolism is certainly abundant, and complex. Koester states that the symbolism is meant to be "concentric, with Jesus at the Heart." The role in navigating the symbols is to reflect how the symbol speaks about Jesus.

<sup>13</sup> Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 310. There is simply no discussion on how the divine could possibly become human at all within the passage. The proof of Jesus divinity is to be found in his life. Grenz continues by stating that the approach to understand Jesus divinity from his life (as the Gospel writer intends) is called "theology from below," and is the only real method for understanding this mystery.

motive in view with this statement. It would seem that the mechanics of incarnation are not of paramount concern here, rather the author is concerned with its function. The content that is prominent within the passage is the testimony of the divine glory of Jesus' life while on earth.<sup>14</sup> This is stated most explicitly in what is considered by scholars as the climax of the prologue "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14).<sup>15</sup> Jo-Ann Brant notes that what the author speaks of is not a glory that is a shining radiance, but instead it is the divinity that Jesus reveals to witnesses in what he says and does.<sup>16</sup> In fact, the gospel writer stakes his claim that Jesus is God, on the foundation of those witnesses capturing a panorama of Jesus' full life, concluding that it is the only explanation of who he is. What this informs us of is that this passage is meant to convey to its audience that God chose to be physically present among humanity, and that those around him were able to have, and acknowledge an encounter with the divine. In other words, in the Incarnation the people were able recognize this glory and say that God is here. This becomes a key thought that is capitalized on by the missional church, and which will be considered further in the following chapter.

However this is not the only verse that makes this connection within the prologue, in fact the entire section preceding it (Jn 1:6-13) functions in the same way. Verse 7 states that John the Baptist serves as a preceding witness. Remarkably, John's witness is unique in that he does not see much of the life of Jesus (the Gospels at least give this

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<sup>14</sup> Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 305.

<sup>15</sup> Kostenberger, *John*, 23. Verses 9–14 is where the gospel writer takes the reader to the core message, of which verse 14 is the defining clause. The "Word becoming flesh" would strike the readers as an outstanding claim, a point that is not to be missed.

<sup>16</sup> See Brant, *John*, 35, for a more in-depth commentary on glory, and the connection to witness.

impression), but instead it is a forward looking, or prophetic witness. Because of this, John's witness is still made in connection to the events, interactions, and words of Jesus over the span of his lifetime.<sup>17</sup> When it comes to the verses mentioning the outcome of recognizing Jesus as the true life, perhaps the most intriguing element contributing to this understanding of the incarnation comes in verses 10 and 11. In these verses the author makes a connection between recognizing and believing in Jesus with redemption, and becoming children of God. Kostenberger states that believing in the name of Jesus implies believing in the divine name, which is being revealed through his ministry; this goes back to the description of Jesus as the true light (Jn 1:6).<sup>18</sup> In a sense there is a very functional purpose to thinking of the incarnation as the span of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. God has come to dwell among humanity to reveal himself so that people may believe and have life. This is the very missional core of the incarnation, the message John is wishing to bring forward to his audience as he is about to provide an account of the life and ministry of Christ in the gospel.

Continuing with verse 14, the missional thrust of the prologue can be further explored by looking at the second half of the verse "the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." The first part of the passage to explore is the connection between the glory of Jesus, and his position as the only Son. While the term son of God is used for other people in the Synoptics, or in Paul's writings,

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<sup>17</sup> Kostenberger, *John*, 33. Witnesses were known as vital for the readers of John, it affirms authenticity and truthfulness in the facts that are presented. With this in mind it says a lot that the full life of Jesus is put forward in the prophetic witness of John, so much so that he is described as being true about everything that he said (John 10:42).

<sup>18</sup> Kostenberger, *John*, 38–9

it is attributed only to Jesus in the Johannine writings.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, Jesus is described here as very unique in his relationship to the father, as also stressed by the word “only.” As a result his glory must be understood within that relationship. In the ancient world the only son would be the recipient of the entire inheritance from the father. This meant receiving everything that constituted the honor of the father including his name, estate, and wealth.<sup>20</sup> However, to the audience reading John, inheritance would have meant more than just the possessions received by the Son. Inheritance was also about the son’s commission to continue in the work of the father. When the passage is now read with this meaning in mind as well, it is clear that when the writer speaks of the glory of Jesus, he is making it clear that it is the same thing as the glory of God, and that his glory is evidence of his sonship, and his mission from the Father.<sup>21</sup> Moving ahead to the final clause of this passage, the writer finally gives an indication what the glory is, by choosing to describe Jesus as one full of “grace and truth.”<sup>22</sup> Grace (ἡ χάρις) is very common descriptor of God throughout the NT with a semantic domain that covers beauty, kindness, goodwill, favor, and gratitude.<sup>23</sup> Interpreting the sense of this word in context Brant notes “*Charis* ... captures the concept of God’s abundant goodness being shared with humanity.”<sup>24</sup> Truth (ἡ ἀληθεία) in the Greek can be read as genuine, real or authentic, while its Hebrew equivalent relates to what is trustworthy, such as God’s covenant with

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<sup>19</sup> McHugh, *John 1–4*, 58. Christians, or followers of Christ would always be called τέκνα, child or children of God.

<sup>20</sup> Brant, *John*, 35.

<sup>21</sup> McHugh, *John 1–4*, 59.

<sup>22</sup> McHugh, *John 1–4*, 59. There is some exegetical debate whether the writer is specifically describing Jesus or the Father as one who is filled with grace and truth. However, because the gospel communicates so clearly the unity that exists in their relationship, the meaning of this passage does not functionally change regardless of the interpretation that is chosen.

<sup>23</sup> Phillips, *The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel*, 208.

<sup>24</sup> Brant, *John*, 35.

Israel in the OT. Commentators often state that the writer is purposely drawing from both the Greek and the Hebrew in his statement.<sup>25</sup> For Jesus to be described as full of ἁληθεία means that he is both real and authentic in the abstract sense, but that he is also the very promise of God now among humanity. When this term is read together with ἡγάρις it is clear that the author wishes to convey that Jesus' presence is in itself a divine gift to humanity. In Jesus, an abundant love and mercy, along with steadfast faithfulness is now on earth, a very emphatic statement, with a definite missional thrust.

With the missional core of the incarnation illuminated by understanding the central purpose of John's prologue, an examination into the key words of the passage, and specifically the climax (Jn 1:14) will confirm and expand it. The word that is most heavily studied in the entire gospel, is "Word" or λόγος.<sup>26</sup> In addition to the writer's clear claim that the Word was God, the very choice of the term λόγος also speaks into this statement. There are several possible roots to draw from, but the consensus is that the writer is drawing from its use in the OT as the "creator of all things," and revealer of God's will, as well as the Aramaic term Memra conveying the ever-present "Holy, Ineffable, Name of God."<sup>27</sup> This is significant because the Word becoming flesh then is not a partial, lesser, or illusionary expression, but the complete and full presence of God among people. In other words, humanity suddenly had direct contact with the full glory

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<sup>25</sup> See Philips, *The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel*. 208–9, and McHugh, *John 1–4*, 60. For a more in depth discussion on the semantic range of the term in both Greek and Hebrew.

<sup>26</sup> Brant, *John*, 25. Λόγος has been a significant source of interest for Johannine scholars because of its integral position and particular use by the author. The theological connections are considerable but go beyond the scope of this present study.

<sup>27</sup> See McHugh, *John 1–4*. 9. For a discussion on the possible origins for λόγος, and what the author would be trying to convey by utilizing this term. Note that McHugh chooses the fourth interpretation of Memra ("an exegetical term representing a theology of the name YHYH") as to what the gospel writer is alluding to.

of the divine.<sup>28</sup> A second key word that bears much significance is “flesh,” or σάρξ.

Anthony Hanson states that for the writer, σάρξ is a direct physical reference to all of humanity, who fell into sin, living in weakness and in direct opposition to God.<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, John's intention in using this term is that the writer wishes to highlight how Jesus is not just entering into the general human domain, but into our very darkness. We can see, even in this introduction of these two terms; σάρξ and λόγος that there is a sense of the impossibility that these two ideas could ever dwell together. However John's gospel offers to us the idea that Jesus has taken on both the reality of humanity with all of the limitations, weaknesses and failures that come with it.<sup>30</sup> He also brings with him the fullness of the divine logos and the divine nature that it conveys.

Finally, the final word that must be considered in this brief study is the word, “dwell,” or σκηνώ. It is here that John's use of this incredible image comes together. The direct translation without context is *pitching a tent, take up one's abode, or settle*.<sup>31</sup> Though the verb by itself has temporary sense, throughout the remainder of the NT, and in the LXX, the term is predominantly used to convey taking up long-term residence.<sup>32</sup> Of all the references available the one specific image that the author evokes the most is God's dwelling place in the tabernacle and the temple. In the OT, God's presence in the

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<sup>28</sup> Kostenberger, *John*. 41. The idea that the divine could take on “evil” matter, let alone the form on sinful humanity was directly opposed to gnostic thinking, as well as Greeks who held a spiritual/matter dualism. 60Hanson, *The Prophetic Gospel*, 271. An important distinction that should not be forgotten is the corporeality of this existence. Though Jesus has entered into one literal physical presence, the Jewish, and Greco-Roman culture is far less individualistic than our own. The Word becoming flesh is meant to depict Jesus entering into the complete existence in a way that is not easily described in our culture.

<sup>30</sup> Phillips, “The Prologue of the Gospel,” 272, 283. Jesus is shown in John's gospel to experience fatigue (4:6), weeping from Lazarus' death (11:35), being troubled, betrayed by his disciples, and publicly mocked before dying.

<sup>31</sup> Phillips, *The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel*, 198.

<sup>32</sup> McHugh, *John 1–4*, 55. Specifically in the LXX the compounded form κατάσκηνώ is the most frequently used. It is this use that brings out the long and permanent dwelling the most, which is why it is used.



tabernacle and the temple was an indication of his covenant relationship with Israel. In fact, once the Mosaic covenant is made the very first command given by Yahweh is to gather materials for the construction of the tabernacle (Ex 25-31). At this moment Yahweh also gives the promise, “and I shall dwell among you.” (Ex 25:8). This promise is repeated again in Israel’s narrative when the tabernacle is about to be consecrated (Ex 29:45), during the dedication of the temple under Solomon (1 Kg 6:13), and then looking forward to God’s presence once again being in the new temple after the exile (Ez 43:7).<sup>33</sup> For the people of Israel, the covenant was what identified and distinguished them from among the nations, and mostly because they were the people whom God dwelled with. Of course, when God’s presence is described to have left the temple it marks the end of a covenant, and the end of a relationship. For the divine λόγος to become flesh and make a dwelling among humanity is a significant statement that in Jesus humans have an opportunity for relationship once again with the divine. In the same way that Yahweh came amongst, and dwelled among Israel, Jesus came and was among the people of Galilee and Judea. The incarnation of the divine becoming flesh is therefore something that is motivated by establishing relationship, which is a very important point that will come to influence the direction of the church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as well as its leadership.

### **The Incarnation in the Christ Hymn (Philippians 2:6–11)**

The Christ Hymn is the second important passage when discussing the incarnation, and like the prologue in John, this passage also reveals that the core of the

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<sup>33</sup> McHugh, *John 1–4*, 55.

incarnation is the proclamation of the presence of God among people. After stating in verse 6 that Christ Jesus was in his nature God, Paul continues in verses 7 and 8 to say:

“he made himself nothing  
by taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.  
8 And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
by becoming obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!”

What is clear from reading the Hymn is that like the prologue in John's Gospel, the passage does not talk about the incarnation as an event, but as a confession of the life of Christ. Once again, any description about the birth narrative, or any details surrounding Jesus' birth are absent, which theologians traditionally usually discuss as proof for the union of the divine with humanity.<sup>34</sup> Instead, the text moves quickly, after recalling how Jesus is God who became human, it testifies to how he remained obedient through the duration of this time, until even his death on the cross. In fact, if any part of Jesus' life is more significant in this incarnation passage it would not be his birth, but his death.<sup>35</sup> It is after all, the only clearly defined event that is mentioned. The question now is: what does this passage add to the picture of the incarnation that has been formed from reading John? The answer to this question is found in how Paul uses the incarnation to convey an important message to his readers. In the verses preceding the Christ Hymn we notice that Paul is instructing the church to have unity through humility in their relationships with

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<sup>34</sup> Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*. 310. Paul does not even mention the *logos* at all within his incarnation passage, instead he refers to the person of Christ Jesus.

<sup>35</sup> Heil, *Philippians*, 90–91, notes that Jesus' death is the climactic moment in this passage as the humility shown in Jesus escalates from emptying himself, to becoming human in likeness, to finally being humble to even death on the cross. The incarnation points forward to this climax in the life of Jesus, as this where his path of humility takes him.

one another (2:1-4).<sup>36</sup> He then exhorts the church that their “attitude should be the same as Christ Jesus.” (2:5). Drawing from the incarnation of Christ across his full life as a human, including his death, he continually reflects on how it required great humility all throughout. Jesus, was in every sense of the matter God, fully divine yet he did not consider divinity “something to be grasped” (2:6). Jesus selflessly made himself nothing, a slave in the very darkness and weakness of human flesh, and chose to remain humble for the entire duration of his life, finalizing it with his death (2:7-8). While Paul’s main purpose through this passage is to instruct selflessness in the church, he does reveal something incredible about the incarnation: it required great humility.<sup>37</sup> The key question to draw from this passage is why did it require humility? As we will see in the next chapter, humility becomes critical for the missional calling of the church, therefore having the incarnation inform this perspective is theologically foundational to the churches practice of its calling.

As an introduction to this idea we can note that Paul speaks of Jesus’ humility when it comes to the incarnation, by recollecting it as a series of great sacrifices that were required of him. The first sacrifice in the passage comes when Jesus is simply willing to take on the form of humanity in all its weakness and separation. Verse 7 describes it as Jesus emptying himself as he took the nature of a slave, and the form of a human. What does it mean for Jesus to have emptied himself, and become a slave? The description of Jesus emptying himself would have never been understood as Jesus giving up his divinity

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<sup>36</sup> Fee, *Philippians*, 175. The larger picture also includes the church in the face of persecution, and Paul’s instruction for them to have unity in the face of this challenge.

<sup>37</sup> See Heil, *Philippians*, 85–86 for a brief description on why Paul is calling for humility and unity among the church and how he calls on Christ’s example to support his suggestion. The link between humility and the incarnation is inferred based on how Paul cites it as the primary example for humility in the church.

to Paul's audience, but instead it would be understood as Jesus pouring himself out, or offering up himself.<sup>38</sup> The way Jesus offers himself, as described by Paul, is to become a slave or that the incarnation is "the manifestation of the form of God, into the form of a slave."<sup>39</sup> Against the background of slavery in Roman rule, a slave was understood as one who has no rights, including the most basic human rights.<sup>40</sup> This illustration expresses that for Christ to take on the form of a human it requires him to release his divine nature in a way that is comparable to a free person willingly choosing a life of slavery. The incomprehensibility of this is that great. If someone were to actually do this there would be no value to be gained from becoming a slave, only loss. Yet Christ chooses that for himself. He puts aside all of his privileges and chooses to dwell among humanity in an act of great humility. Additionally it is important to note that in the case of this passage, and in John 1, Jesus is not described as becoming similar, or like human beings, but that he became an actual human.<sup>41</sup> In this sense, Jesus is not a bystander to the human experience, but an active member and participant in it. In other words, when it comes to the incarnation, the great humility exhibited by Christ comes as he fully pours himself out into humanity, and is willing to come into our situation.

However, the real magnificence of the humility shown by Christ in the incarnation is demonstrated as the passage continues with the description of how he

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<sup>38</sup> Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 210–211. The direct translation would be to "empty himself" which is meant as a metaphor to describe Jesus' sacrificing everything. It is the interpretation that fits within the overall message of the passage. Jesus is not a God to grasp and take everything and anything, rather he gives all that he is.

<sup>39</sup> Bruce, *St. Paul in Macedonia*, 270.

<sup>40</sup> O'Brien, *Philippians*, 225. There is a wide range of interpretation for understanding Paul's description of Jesus taking the form of a slave. O'Brien takes the position that this passage continues using metaphors, and imagery and that the term slave is no exception. Other possibilities include, becoming a slave to God, giving up the form of God, and giving himself up to demonic powers. See O'Brien's analysis for a complete argument against these views on pages 225–226.

<sup>41</sup> Heil, *Philippians*. 88.

chose to live. As God, Jesus could have reigned and taken the spot of honor and authority on earth. Instead, the passage says “he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross!” (Phil 2:8). Paul is clear to say that Jesus chose a life of a servant, and obedience. Obedience is widely recognized as obedience to the will of God, not obedience to pleasing the wishes of humanity. However, there is a strong connection that obedience to God involves serving humankind.<sup>42</sup> In this statement there are two things we can gain in our understanding of the incarnation. The first is the servant nature of Jesus’ incarnation, a thought that is felt again by the famous words of Jesus in Mark 10:45 “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” The very purpose of the incarnation is to serve and to sacrifice. Without recognizing this important detail the incarnation is stripped of its message, a detail that must not be overlooked once we begin to look at how to apply incarnational theology to the church. The second insight, is simply the great extent of Jesus’s sacrifice. Paul writes that he was obedient to death, even death on a cross. To die for someone is already an act of sacrifice, and humility in and of itself, but Paul is precise to note that Christ’s death was by crucifixion. The cross was an execution method reserved for the most despicable criminals. It is the most humiliating form of death known in the Roman Empire, and by no means would it be a hero’s death.<sup>43</sup> However, instead of looking to the cross as an agent of shame, Jesus remained obedient. He faced death, shame, and

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<sup>42</sup> O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 229. The other common exegetical mistake is to suggest that Jesus was obedient to death itself. This of course misses the perspective of Christ’s humility as he subjects himself lower than others.

<sup>43</sup> Thurston, *Philippians and Philemon*, 83. The cross was so despised that Roman citizens were not even eligible to die by it. It symbolizes Christ’s love for humanity, and became central to Pauline Christology.

humility and choose to take it all on, and bring restoration to humanity. The Incarnation thus ends in sacrifice, and Christ's tenure on earth is marked as a life dedicated in service.

## **Summary**

This brief look at Incarnational theology shows the biblical writers certainly have a lot more in mind when they write of the incarnation than is often credited to them in some theological traditions. The passages that we have considered for the formation of the doctrine both explicitly recall the complete life of Jesus in their statements about the divine union with humanity through the person Jesus of Nazareth. The gospel of John does this by appealing to the glory revealed in Christ's life and ministry, while the Christ hymn in Philippians points towards his humility in his existence among humanity and subsequent death on the cross. In these passages we can look to the incarnation as a statement that God's presence has come to dwell among humanity, and his arrival is directly connected to his mission, and plan for the redemption of humanity. The writers also inform us that this act defies the boundaries that are often foisted upon God. Instead the passages that we have studied reveal his great humility and willingness to sacrifice in the fulfillment of his mission, a quality that will be revisited later on. Therefore in the doctrine of the incarnation we find more than a description of the great mystery how Jesus was both divine and human. We find a grand statement about the missional character of God, a trait that is becoming more and more important for us to understand and embrace.

## **Chapter Two: The Incarnation & the Church: Exploring the Missional Church**

Having established the missional emphasis of the doctrine of the incarnation, and as a result, the missional character of God, it is time to turn our attention towards the church. The important question that must be addressed at this point is: what impact does this missional understanding of the incarnation have on understanding the nature of the church and its ministry? After all if the incarnation does not apply to the church in a tangible way, then it is meaningless to discuss incarnational leadership and ministry. This chapter is dedicated to bridging the biblical and theological foundations of the incarnation from chapter one with the presentation of an incarnational leadership model found in chapters three and four. To accomplish this some core biblical and theological principles will be drawn upon to argue for how the church is called to be incarnational in carrying forward the mission of God. However, unlike chapter one, this chapter will additionally draw upon literature from the missional church movement in addition to biblical and theological texts. The chapter will be broken down into two broad sections. The first section will lay out the scriptural points that discuss the identity of the church as incarnational. The second section will explore how the ministry of a church that adopts an incarnational model would take shape. This will include a couple of practical examples that will serve as illustrations for how an incarnational church could look in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This section will also establish a bridge to the final two chapters that outline a model for incarnational leadership.

### **Foundations for the Incarnational Church**

There are several key biblical and theological points that lay the foundation for understanding the incarnational identity of the church. For this part of the discussion the

missional church literature is rather valuable. As described earlier, the missional church writers have already written extensively about the nature and shape of the church. They have studied the scriptures and probed the discipline of Missiology to provide new insights regarding the calling of the church, as well as revisiting early church perspectives that may have been lost during the church's evolution throughout its history.<sup>1</sup> As a result there is a great wealth of biblical arguments readily available that help describe what a missional church really is. Several of these points are crucial to this thesis as we seek to establish the church as incarnational.

#### 1. *Missio Dei*, The Mission of God

The first point to discuss is the mission of God, or *missio Dei*. This term is very important to this discussion because it argues for God's activity and leading in mission. The *missio Dei* is actually a term that precedes all missional church writings as it was used first in 1952 by Karl Hartenstein in a follow up report to the Willingen conference of the International Missionary Council. The term, and its development has been very influential among missional church writers in the past decade or so.<sup>2</sup> Previously, the church's mission was widely understood through the lens of obedience to the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) and similar passages. It was the job of the church to take the initiative and follow through on the instructions passed down to them by Jesus. However, the *missio Dei* makes the statement that it is really God who is initiating, and

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<sup>1</sup> Leslie Newbigin's *Foolish to the Greeks*, or *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* are often considered to be the most influential missiological writings on the missional church. He brings forward the approach of looking at the West through the eyes of a missionary, and particularly dissecting the relationship between the Gospel and Western culture.

<sup>2</sup> Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 29.



who is active in mission.<sup>3</sup> Darrell Gulder offers an important perspective for this point by re-framing mission within the larger biblical metanarrative. He writes in the introduction of *Missional Church* that “mission is the result of God’s initiative, rooted in God’s purposes to heal and restore humanity.”<sup>4</sup> He then recalls that this mission is ongoing beginning with the blessing of Abraham, and of his offspring so that they may be a blessing to the nations, through the narrative of Israel, in the life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus, and finally in the Spirit’s leading of the church until the last days. Therefore, the mission of the church is really a part of the larger picture of God’s redemptive plans. Going back to the previous chapter, understanding God’s missional narrative is a clear indicator of his missional nature. The second point that must be stressed here is that God is continually active in mission even after the cross, resurrection, and ascension to the heavens. We need to put behind us the notion that the ministry is something that has been passed on, no longer with any direct involvement from the divine. In Ross Hastings book *Missional God, Missional Church* he explores this new understanding of mission through an exegesis of Jesus words “As the father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21). He notes that this passage is actually an invitation into “co-mission” where the sending of the disciples is a continuation of the sending of the Son. Particularly important is the observation of the verb “sent” (ἀπέσταλκέν) in the perfect tense implying the continual status of Jesus as one who is sent and the Father as

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<sup>3</sup> Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 30. The impetus for this shift is due to the emergence of renewed interest in Trinitarian theology, where the former understanding of mission came from a heavily Christocentric centered theology.

<sup>4</sup> Guder, “Missional Church,” 4.

one who sends.<sup>5</sup> Therefore the implication is God is continually sending, reaching and pouring into humanity, though now it involves human agents.

## 2. The Kingdom of God

The second foundational point to explore is the Kingdom of God, or as it is sometimes referred to, the Reign of God. For many who are writing about the missional church this point is important because it attempts to discover and encapsulate what God's mission truly is. For this thesis it is relevant to touch upon this topic because understanding the larger picture will help inform how an incarnational ministry must look. The Kingdom of God is recognized by most theologians as having a dual status, it is already here (Mark 1:15), yet still to come (Luke 22:18). But what is actually meant by the term "kingdom of God?" Edward Meadors states that as a term it "communicates the power, authority, justice, righteousness, eternal nature, and salvific plan of God."<sup>6</sup> He also states that to the Jews, it referenced the idea of a cosmic rule, kingship, or sovereign activity of God. Another helpful understanding comes from Arthur Holmes who summarized the OT understanding of the coming kingdom as *shalom*. This vision looked towards a future where peace, justice and celebration would occupy the land.<sup>7</sup> There is also a practical theology of *shalom* that has current implications in terms of the ministry of the church. Jesus invited people into *shalom* during his ministry by calling them into a life of peace, joy and justice (Jn 14:27, 15:11). Later, through the filling of the Spirit, the

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<sup>5</sup> Hastings, *Missional God, Missional Church*, 82. He also notes that the Trinitarian understanding of the union between the three persons of the Godhead implies the presence of each member through what is sent. Just as the Father was with the Son, so the Father and Son are also with the church because of union with the Spirit, and our resulting union with Christ.

<sup>6</sup> Meadors, *Jesus the Messianic Herald of Salvation*, 154.

<sup>7</sup> Hunsberger, "Missional Vocations," 91.

church would actually experience this shalom in their life.<sup>8</sup> We only have to go as far as the first gatherings after Pentecost to see the church meeting continually in communion with God, and giving all their possessions so that no one among them is in need (Acts 2:42-47). Most importantly though, *shalom* is the blessing of living in covenant relationship with God and it is entered into through God's reconciliation with us. Taking these two perspectives together, we can see that to speak of the kingdom of God is to speak of God's reign as a king, overseeing all that is his. It also speaks to what God's reign looks like. The kingdom of God comes with peace, rest, restoration, and justice.<sup>9</sup> This is evident through the incarnation of the Son. We see Jesus instructing his disciples to "heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'" (Luke 10:9). Jesus is clear that evidence of the in-breaking kingdom is that the debilitating structures of this world are reversed when the kingdom comes. Here the kingdom is still associated with the presence of Jesus (and the commissioned disciples).<sup>10</sup> However it also includes from this passage the healing of the sick, and elsewhere the lame waking, and the lepers cleansed, ceasing of hostility, and solidarity with the oppressed. Therefore, the reign of God must be understood from this broader, and more holistic point of view. Yes, God came to give us reconciliation and relationship, but the larger picture of his mission is to bring *Shalom* to the rest of the nations. This has a profound impact on the scope of what an incarnational ministry will really look like.

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<sup>8</sup> Goheen, *A Light to the Nation*, 93. Isaiah 42:1 is an important passage that speaks to the important connection between the coming of the kingdom of God, and justice. Jesus is described as receiving the Spirit and then bringing justice to the nations.

<sup>9</sup> House, "The Day of the Lord," 207.

<sup>10</sup> Marshall, *Luke*, 422.

### 3. A Sent People

The next point to explore is one of the most important for the missional church, the church as sent people. This point is important to touch upon because it emphasizes that the church is the collection of Christ followers, and that the nature of the church is missional. This point is first explored in Hunsberger's essay "Missional Vocations" in the groundbreaking book *Missional Church*. A critical component of this perspective is that the church is not primarily an institution or place, but people. Hunsberger notes that traditionally, the common understanding of church is limited to a place by how people talk about "going to church" or "which church do you belong to?"<sup>11</sup> Of course, a quick look at the biblical witness informs us that the church is primarily to be thought of as a collection of people. There are several different motifs found throughout the NT that contribute to this. The Greek word used for church ἐκκλησία is used commonly to describe an assembly, as well as a group of those who are "called out."<sup>12</sup> The church is also described as a nation, the body of Christ, and the community of the covenant.<sup>13</sup> Each of these points identifies the church primarily as a people group. While it is worthwhile to break down each of the NT motifs for the church, that task is far too large for this thesis, however Stanley Grenz provides a helpful description to summarize what the church is. He writes that the church is "a special people...who see themselves as standing in

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<sup>11</sup> Hunsberger, "Missional Vocation," 79. Hunsberger notes that missional descriptions of the church are brought forward by the reformers. However, he traces how their theological statement that a church is wherever the gospel is preached and sacraments administered devolves into a focus on the place where the community gathers, as opposed to the community itself.

<sup>12</sup> Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 464. The term *ekklesia* comes from the verb *kaleo* "to call." Many theologians have concluded that the noun can be thought of as "the called out ones."

<sup>13</sup> See Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*. 463–485 for an overview of the biblical description of the nature of the church. Also useful is Goheen, *A Light to the Nations*, 157–162 for a short description on the church as the people of God.

relationship with the God who saves them, and to each other as those who share in this Salvation.”<sup>14</sup> In this statement Grenz captures how the church, as people, are a group who experience an identity change in their life. Receiving salvation, they suddenly enjoy fellowship with the creator God. They also share this identity with each other as it actually draws them together to form a new family regardless of ethnicity, social-economic status and cultural values. Therefore, the first step is to recognize that the church is not just a gathering to attend, or a club to participate in but a community of belonging that is bound by the work of Christ on the cross.

Of course the second component of this theme is an understanding of the church as a people sent in God’s mission. As mentioned above, the task of mission is primarily God’s, but this does not take away from the important role that mission must play in the life of church. Jesus told his disciples that “whoever serves me, must follow me; and where I am my servant must be” (John 12:26). The instruction is a clear invitation to follow Jesus in his mission. In context, this passage offers far more. Jesus is warning his disciples of his imminent death, the invitation into mission is no longer following Jesus by foot as they had done so far, it is a call to follow him after his death and resurrection, and continue the mission. This call is not just upon the select disciples, but upon the entire church. Peter writes to the churches in Asia Minor:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Pet 2:9-10)

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<sup>14</sup> Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 464.

There is a very missional push in this statement from Peter. He draws from OT references (Ex 19:3-6, Isa 43:20-21, and Hos 1:6, 9; 2:1) that described Israel as a chosen people and a light to the nations through whom God's salvation plan will be enacted.<sup>15</sup> Peter makes clear that this vision now applies to the church. Furthermore, in verses 11-12 Peter also instructs the church that as they live holy lives, it will result in others seeing their good deeds and glorifying God on the day of redemption.<sup>16</sup> There is no doubt then that each member of the people of God is called into missional living. Another place where this understanding of the church can be found is by looking once again at the Greek term ἐκκλησία. This word was commonly used to describe a Roman public assembly where citizens were called out to settle the issues in the city.<sup>17</sup> The key difference when Paul calls the believers at Corinth "the church of God in Corinth" (1 Cor 1:2) is that the assembly is no longer called out by the town clerk, but by God. While the church may not be called to govern the city as officials, the term does capture the idea that the church is meant to have an impact within their local city. This impact of course for the church comes from being a group of people who are called to announce the kingdom of God. In essence, the very word "church" is intentional to describe an assembly, or collection of people pursuing God's mission. These texts make clear that to speak of an incarnational church is to speak of an incarnational people. Incarnation is not a program, event or place. It is a group of people seeking to live out the ministry of Jesus in their local context. This ideal applies to each member of the church not just a specific few.

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<sup>15</sup> Jobes, *1 Peter*, 160–161.

<sup>16</sup> Goheen, *A Light to the Nations*, 160. The ancient claims laid upon Israel as a royal priesthood and holy nation is now for the church. This is now their role within the world as it was for Israel.

<sup>17</sup> Goheen, *A Light to the Nations*, 180.

## **What is the Incarnational Church?**

Having laid the foundations by highlighting some key perspectives for the missional church the task now turns to discussing how the Incarnation applies to the church by focusing on the biblical descriptions of the incarnational church. This brings us to consider two important themes that continually arise in writings that present the church as incarnational. The first theme describes the church as incarnational because God's presence is within the church after the pouring out of the Spirit on Pentecost. The second finds inspiration and guidance from the way Jesus lived, and explores some of the more practical components of what an incarnational life involves. Both of these perspectives have very meaningful insights to contribute and will be explored below.

### **1. A Community Defined by God's Presence**

Perhaps the point that is more appropriate to begin with is the focus on God's presence among humanity continuing past the Incarnation of Jesus and into the life of the church. We can be tempted to start strategizing incarnational techniques while skipping this all important theological truth. Hastings writes, "the free act of God in the incarnation, by the cross, resurrection, and the coming of the Spirit, has brought Christians into union with Christ such that they are now the continuation of God's incarnational mission."<sup>18</sup> In essence, God's presence is now found in the church because of the pouring out of the Spirit. Paul reminds the church in Corinth of this truth as he writes, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Cor 3:16 NASB). The word dwelling is reminiscent of the prologue in the gospel of John. Except now instead of God dwelling as another physical person among

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<sup>18</sup> Hastings, *Missional God, Missional Church*, 166.

humanity, Paul writes that he dwells within each believer. The missional thrust of this idea is that because of this union with the Spirit, God continues to dwell amongst humanity through the very lives of Christians. It is important to emphasize that this does not imply that the person Jesus of Nazareth, who was both fully divine and fully human is now replicated in each Christian.<sup>19</sup> Paul clearly articulates that the divine dwells *within* each believer, which is of course something entirely different. This idea is found again in Ephesians 2:22 where Paul writes to the church “in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.” The difference to note in this passage is that Paul is also stressing that the Spirit also dwells in the gathered church. Specifically, Paul is discussing the unification of Jews and Gentiles into a single people group, the children of the new covenant.<sup>20</sup> Though these two groups were previously alienated from one another and God, redemption has allowed them to come together and form a place where the Spirit dwells. Therefore, there is this unique presence of God within the gathered church that draws people together who are otherwise separate. It is indeed a very missional idea. Since Chapter one reminds us that the Incarnation is the missional notion that God has made himself present within the fallen state of humanity it is quite appropriate to speak of the church as incarnational because at the core it is about God’s presence among humanity.

Simply recognizing that God is present in the church and amongst humanity brings a hopeful perspective, but understanding the very ministry of the Spirit that dwells

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<sup>19</sup> Frost, *Exiles*, 54. Frost states that many consider the idea of calling the church "incarnational" offensive or unorthodox because of this point. It is important to note that the Incarnation in Jesus is unique, and that one needs to be very clear of the biblical arguments for why we can consider calling the church incarnational.

<sup>20</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 178.



within the members of the Church adds to that hope. The Bible presents the Spirit not as a passive bystander in the Trinity, but as active in bringing redemption to all of life, including bringing people back into a right relationship with God.<sup>21</sup> It is also the role of the Spirit to charge the new shift in the mission during the dawn of the church, spreading the news to the ends of the earth about the salvation now available to all humanity.<sup>22</sup> A brief reading of Acts reveals just how active the Spirit is in mission. The Spirit is received, by believers and they are converted (Acts 2:38, 9:17, 19:6), speaks through certain people (Acts 6:10, 10:19, 21:4), directs actions and decisions that have missional implications (Acts 8:29, 8:39, 13:2-4, 15:28, 16:6-7, 21:4), and empowers the believers (4:8, 4:31, 6:3-5, 7:55, 11:24, 13:9, 13:52).<sup>23</sup> In fact the Spirit is so integral that Jesus instructs the apostles to not do anything, and wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit. It is only with the power that they receive from the Holy Spirit that they will be able to be witnesses “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest parts of the world.” (Acts 1:8). This reality even extends to the church in Canada today. Taking the notion of God’s continued presence in the Canadian church seriously means recognizing that the Spirit is just as active in mission today as in the book of Acts. That includes trusting the Spirit to be involved in conversions, speaking through individuals, directing actions and decisions, and empowering the church for mission. Indeed one of the important reasons for the church to embrace incarnational ministry is because it means embracing God’s direct presence, something that carries great potential. When it

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<sup>21</sup> Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 26. It is helpful to understand the redemptive ministry of the Spirit in conjunction with the creative ministry beginning with creation. This is a topic Van Gelder touches upon in greater detail, but cannot be explored here due to restrictions on the scope of this thesis.

<sup>22</sup> Goheen, *A Light to the Nations*, 174.

<sup>23</sup> See Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 39–40 for an expanded list of the Spirit’s activity within the Book of Acts. The chapter “Spirit-Led Ministry in the Bible” is also a constructive summary of the Spirit’s roles throughout the biblical narrative.

comes to Incarnational leadership, something leaders will need to incorporate is learning how to follow God into mission.

## 2. A Community Inspired by the Incarnation Model

The second theme in the discussion of how the incarnation applies to the church is the conversation around how Jesus' Incarnate life is the inspiration, and model for how the church lives incarnationally. This discussion is fascinating on several levels primarily because of the creativity and possibilities that have been brought forward by the various writers, churches, and local missionaries who champion incarnational ministry. The diversity is wide, ranging from certain individuals doing creative things in mission to emergent churches that abandon traditional structures, to more established churches looking to transform their ministry as they seek to live out the example of Jesus in their own context.<sup>24</sup> A theme that will emerge in the remainder of this chapter is that incarnational ministry is not limited to the size of a church, or the type of community the church it is present in.<sup>25</sup> It involves the church responding and adjusting in response to the people they are called to reach out to, and God's specific leading for them. What binds these diverse communities together is the hope and the goal of following Jesus into their own communities and neighborhoods as a part of God's missional plans. There are three key features of a community that is inspired by the incarnation model.

### 2.1 Identification

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<sup>24</sup> Halter and Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom*, 35. Numerically speaking it is more common to see smaller and medium sized churches make the transition to incarnational communities. Most of the examples in *Tangible Kingdom* fit this description. There is one example where the authors report consulting a mega-church through the journey and cite the transition plan required a 10 year commitment. Larger, and more traditional churches can be incarnational, but it requires a tremendous effort to transform the culture.

<sup>25</sup> See Stiller, *Going Missional* for a summary of thirteen different Canadian churches participating in the missional journey. Each church has a unique membership, geography, and contextual situation.

When it comes to developing an incarnational understanding of the ministry of the church that is modeled after Jesus the first feature to discuss is Jesus' identification with sinful humanity. The passages describing the Incarnation (John 1:14, Phil 2:7-8) have shown that one of the most important details is that the Divine has come into the fallen and ordinary world, and made himself one within it. The biblical narrative continues by illustrating how the Spirit continues this mission by first of all uniting itself with the church body, and commissioning the church into mission. To take this approach as a model for the church means that the church must also live amongst and identify itself with the sinners and the broken in society. Michael Frost writes that it means that the church is finding ways to share and participate in the tears, frustrations, and challenges of the community, communicating and interacting with the language and thoughts of those they are trying to reach, and even taking the light of the gospel into some of the most difficult, and most rejected parts of society.<sup>26</sup> In simple terms, the host community the church is placed within no longer sees that church as an untrusted outside, but as a people who are very much like them.

This is radically different from the approach which has dominated the church over the past century. As discussed earlier, the Christendom model has defined the church, and church ministry as what happens within the four walls of the building during sanctioned gatherings. Essentially, people must come to the church in order to meet God. The result of this mindset has produced what is often called the *attractional* approach to mission.<sup>27</sup> This approach is characterized by inviting people to church to come hear the gospel, be a part of a youth rally, or another event. In this approach people are encouraged to come

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<sup>26</sup> Frost, *Exiles*. 55. Adapted from his four aspects of Incarnational Christian witness.

<sup>27</sup> McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, 49–50.

out from their environment, cross a cultural barrier, and enter into the culture of the church. This is problematic because it goes against what is seen in the ministry of Jesus, where he approaches and goes to the broken, the drinkers, and the sinners.<sup>28</sup> It is also increasingly ineffective as Canadian postmodern society becomes less and less trusting of the church, and organized religion.<sup>29</sup>

Without the dualistic Christendom theology, the incarnational approach finds churches willing to identify with those God is looking to redeem by employing a *Go to Them* mentality.<sup>30</sup> How this looks in practice is quite broad and diverse. In some of the more radical cases the church might be a very small group (less than 15 people), or several small groups that meet in informal gathering places such as cafes, restaurants, general stores, community centers. They will share, pray, and study the Bible together during this time, and hope that by being in close proximity to the un-churched they may build connections with them, maybe even have them join their community.<sup>31</sup> These gatherings may not look like a church to someone from traditional backgrounds, and it is important to be mindful of the difference between a church and a gathering of friends for a spiritual conversation. However these churches are imagining new forms of ministry that are worth paying attention to. The incarnational approach has also been found in larger churches that are looking to join the missional journey. Preaching is geared to

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<sup>28</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 10, 19. This can even occur in settings that look very incarnational on the outside. The authors recall a tale of two different Australian churches setting up congregations at local pubs. The first buys out a pub and convert it into a church building. This takes away the meeting place of the former pub patrons and creates a barrier in their relationship to the church. The second case, the group of

<sup>29</sup> See Bibby, *Beyond the Gods and Back*, 79–84. For a survey on the decrease in confidence toward religion and religious leaders from Canadians over the past half-century.

<sup>30</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 42. The attractional approach is often referred to as a *Come-To-Us* mentality.

<sup>31</sup> Frost, *Exiles*, 56–60. These types of settings are also called third-spaces which is a place that is not home, or work where people gather to unwind and feel at home.

encourage, and strengthen the body to live as missionaries in their communities and workplaces, giving spiritual meaning to their lives outside the church walls. The church gathering focuses on celebrating God's story in the church (among individuals and the larger body). Small groups are encouraged to have meetings which are remarkably similar to the smaller churches described above. For some of the even larger churches there have been incarnational approaches to using resources such as a building or staff. Churches can use their building to bless their communities by providing space for community services, or place their staff offices outside of the church in locations where they can cross paths with regular people.<sup>32</sup> Regardless of the method used by each church, or the opportunities that are presented, the goal of course is to build relationships, and find ways to identify with the community.

## 2.2. Contextualization

A second key feature when discussing incarnational ministry modeled after Jesus is the role of contextualization. Contextualization is a concept that is not new to mission. The term was introduced in 1972 in the World Council of Churches Theological Educational Fund, and has been drawn upon by various writers, and individuals since. Hirsch and Frost provide a helpful working definition when they define contextualization as:

The dynamic process whereby the constant message of the gospel interacts with specific, relative human situations. It involves the examination of the gospel in light of the respondents' worldview and then adapting the message, encoding it in such a way that it can become meaningful to the respondent.

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<sup>32</sup> See McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, 53–87 for a more complete description of the examples provided. There are also other areas that McNeal suggests are missional opportunities for the church including technology, finances, and prayer which are worth taking note of.

In addition to providing this definition, they share two important presuppositions. First, that the gospel is valid for all cultures at all points in time, and second, that in order to be communicated effectively, the gospel must be presented within the specific cultural framework of the recipient.<sup>33</sup> Most would agree with point one without any hesitation, it is the second point that has been more contentious.

In the Christendom perspective, the gospel was always attached to the culture of those sharing it (sometimes even used as a means to achieve an alternative goal). The theological reason why this happened is because Christendom believed that God had ordained cultural/societal values of their nation, and sharing the gospel meant that there was a duty to share the values of one's nation.<sup>34</sup> This is most evident during the colonization period. As European countries settled foreign lands, and established colonies they brought English, French and Spanish culture with them, and looked to find ways to make the land and people more French, English, and Spanish etc. Consequently they also brought with them French and Spanish Catholicism, the Church of England from the British, and Lutheranism from the Germans.<sup>35</sup> As the native population was converted to those faiths, they were also assimilated into the respective cultural values of the countries that delivered the faith. While the church has moved past its colonial days, this dangerous theological attitude was still present in other forms even into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>36</sup> In Canada during the first half of the century the Protestant church believed that it had the

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<sup>33</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 83.

<sup>34</sup> Van Gelder, "Missional Context," 48.

<sup>35</sup> See Gonzalez, *Story of Christianity Vol 2*. for a survey on the role of the church during the colonization period.

<sup>36</sup> Hastings, *Missional God, Missional Church*, 167. This is reflected in the doctrine of *tabula rasa*, which says that there is nothing of value in non-Christian cultures on which to build on in mission, therefore all non-Christian culture needs be destroyed in order to allow the gospel to truly take root. Hastings also reports how the years 1800–1950 have been called the age of non-contextualization by some.

responsibility of shaping Canada's moral society. While they earnestly believed the morals they advocated for were biblically mandated, the reality was that they were culturally a Canadian expression of how one ought to live their life.<sup>37</sup> For example, one commonly held value was to abstain from alcohol, and to be Christian would mean observing this value. If someone was not a Christian, or sometime even an immigrant who was Christian, they would be taught to abstain from drinking along with other values that were Protestant Canadian norms. The error is that complete abstinence from alcohol is not actually biblically mandated, and the example illustrates that it is because of church cultural beliefs that it got inserted into their missional objectives. What then has brought contextualization into the missional discussion?

The main theological shift that has advanced the argument for the need to contextualize the gospel is the recognition that the Spirit is not just active in the church, but across all cultures throughout history. This global influence is first seen in Genesis. Here the Spirit's ministry is creation, creating order out of chaos (1:2), bringing life to the world, and breathing life in humanity (2:7). Because all of creation bears the handiwork of God, though the world has fallen, the work of the Spirit continues as new lives begin, new communities form, and even in the formation of new cultures and civilizations.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, the Spirit is also shown continuing to care for creation (Job 33:4, Ps 104:36) including the understanding that humanity still bears the image of God. Previously, it was discussed how the Spirit's ministry of redemption was discussed as having an outward focus, and so it should not be surprising that the themes of creation

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<sup>37</sup> Van Gelder, "Missional Context," 58. This meant that they would reinforce certain values into society such as abstinence from alcohol, gambling, smoking and dancing.

<sup>38</sup> Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 30.

and redemption are now being understood as a connected ministry.<sup>39</sup> Therefore contextualization becomes more than just understanding the language, or cultural dispositions of a people group in order to preach the gospel more effectively. It means that the church must be able to discern how God is present within that community, sub-culture, or people group and point them towards understanding how God is actually at work in their lives, and seeking recreation for them. A great example can be found with the use of songs. Charles Wesley would set Christian lyrics to popular pub songs in his writings.<sup>40</sup> There is a beauty that comes from music, as it is something created by the Spirit. It can be powerful to encourage individuals (including those outside the church) that their passion, and musical gifts have a greater purpose, and that God is involved in their lives through it. The incarnational church will look to do similar things within the context they find themselves in, and leadership will play a crucial role in this regard.

### 2.3. An Alternative Community

The final point that we want to consider is that the incarnational church is to exist as an alternative community. It is this perspective that helps prevent the church from simply being assimilated into the host culture, and Christians becoming completely indistinguishable from everyone else. Essentially this perspective argues that Christians (and the church) through God's redeeming work and unification with the Spirit have a certain uniqueness that radiates and testifies about the glory of God. Biblically, this point is evident. In chapter 1, we saw how the reading of John's gospel illustrated that in the

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<sup>39</sup> Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 58. This connection comes from biblical theology, and fitting together a meta-narrative for the Spirit. The original intention for creation is that all life should flourish. In redemption/re-creation the work of the Spirit is to bring the *whole* world back into the original intention at the time of creation.

<sup>40</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 90, Frost and Hirsch offer a six point rule of thumb for developing a framework of how to appropriately contextualize for a given situation.



Incarnation, the very life of Jesus was testimony of his glory, and that of the Father (John 1:14). The first description of the church shows the early Christians living a radical, and yet redemptive lifestyle where they earnestly sought after God through the apostles teaching, the presence of miracles, sharing meals together, and selling everything they owned to give to those in need. The book of Acts also says that people were drawn to this community so that more were added to their numbers daily (Acts 2:42-47). Lastly, the passage referred to earlier in this chapter from the apostle Peter encouraged the church to see that their lives will cause others to glorify God on the day of redemption (1 Pet 2:12). The church is actually called to be a sign of the arrival of the kingdom it is the eschatological community in which the Spirit's work of re-creation is revealed. There are several passages from the Apostle Paul which provide analogies that really emphasize this point. He writes that the church is the "new creation" (2 Cor 5:17), "the new humanity" (Eph 2:15), and "citizens of the kingdom" (Col 1:13). Therefore the alternative community of the church has nothing to do with effort, or strategy, it is the very nature of the Christian that is different, and a forerunner to God's coming work. Michael Goheen puts it in a unique way when he calls the church a "beachhead of the coming kingdom of God."<sup>41</sup> Essentially God's final plan is for the creation of the heaven and the new earth (Rev 21:1-4), but at this moment the church is the initializing point for the world to witness what the kingdom might actually look like.

The question for the church then is what are the implications of being an alternative community, and what can be done to live as an alternative community? One of the most important components is through "missional deeds," or what might also be

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<sup>41</sup> Goheen, *A Light to the Nations*, 167. He also describes the church as a blueprint for the kingdom, another helpful analogy.

known as good works.<sup>42</sup> The missional church movement has been instrumental in bringing back the importance of both social justice issues and everyday gestures of kindness into the discussion on mission. These have been somewhat neglected by evangelical denominations over the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>43</sup> Passages such as 1 Peter above and others (Matt 5:16, 1 Peter 4:11) already illustrate that genuine acts of both kindness and profound sacrifice reveal the grace of God. For the individual this might be working hard and with honesty in environments that reward selfishness.<sup>44</sup> For some it might also be practicing hospitality, and opening up their home for someone in need, or sharing food with those who may need it. For the church this might involve partnering with local community organizations or international agencies that are not explicitly Christian, but are fighting for causes that line up with kingdom values. There are numerous opportunities in every community ranging from after school programs, to homeless shelters and food banks to name a few. Churches have the resources and people to help, and it will send a message to the rest of the community that God does indeed care about their needs.<sup>45</sup> Another component of being an alternative community is the readiness to stand for kingdom values that are either neglected, or even opposed by the majority of society. McLuhan's monumental statement "the medium is the message" is

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<sup>42</sup> Term coined by Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 137.

<sup>43</sup> Gonzalez, *The History of Christianity*, 474. A retreat from social justice issues among evangelical denominations is one of many byproducts of the rise of fundamentalism in North America. Fundamentalism viewed much of what was occurring in the mainline denominations as a dangerous and founded on a non-biblical footing. The social gospel, and social activism was a major component of ministry for mainline churches, and as a result of the overall tension, it was grouped together with the larger theological discussion.

<sup>44</sup> Frost, *Exiles*, 162,195.

<sup>45</sup> McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, 83.

both a blessing and curse to the church.<sup>46</sup> It is a curse in that it reflects a postmodern world that will turn away from any inconsistencies (intentional or not) in the church's actions. It is a blessing in that it opens new doors for communicating the gospel. Regardless is this dual state, this expression should be taken seriously by the church. For example, if our churches advocate for a God who cares for the poor and marginalized, and seeks justice for all, then the church must also fight for the cause as well. This means on top of serving those in need, the church must provide a voice that speaks into the problems of materialism, social systems, and other factors that may contribute to wealth imbalances. In this example, the incarnational church must also be conscious of its own ministry, and where it allocates its resources. Do churches invest too much into expensive state of the art technology and building spaces to create well produced programs? Could some of those resources go towards supporting those who are struggling with food and housing in the community? For churches that do have such an imbalance it indirectly sends a message that they do not want to invest or care about the needs of the community. This is just one example, but the same can be said about issues such as environmentalism, or the fight against human trafficking. These are causes that are in line with kingdom values, and are also causes in which God's heart may be illuminated, and people can be impacted by. Of course, the church is not supposed to manipulate causes for the purpose of evangelism, but it is still possible to genuinely care for these issues while also revealing God's love. Jesus after all did not only proclaim about the kingdom, but he demonstrated it as well with his action. Having actions match words is very important for

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<sup>46</sup> Frost & Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 149. McLuhan's argument is that all technology and tools are really an extension of ourselves. The structures, and tools we develop reflect our values and intentions

the church as an alternative community because the gospel message is depicted in those actions.

### **Summary**

From this chapter it should be evident that the church is indeed called to live incarnationally. As the conversation surrounding the doctrine of the Incarnation develops its missional hermeneutic, discoveries for its implications on the nature and ministry of the church will only grow. At this moment it is important to recognize that church is incarnational because God continues to be present among humanity within the life of each believer through the Spirit. God's mission is continuing and the church has the privilege to participate within it. Secondly, the incarnational life of Jesus provides a missional model for the ministry of the church. This means that the church will begin to develop an approach that identifies and exists among the people of their host community so that they may build relationships and understand why God might even matter to them. It means the church will contextualize and seek an understanding of how God is already present in the community. It will also work towards understanding how the gospel message communicates and relates to their specific sub culture instead of enforcing the community to join the culture of the church. Finally it means that the church recognizes how it is an alternative community, but how their alternative community is still a light to the nations, and a sign of the coming kingdom. The principles, and ministry of an incarnational church are quite dramatically different than the typical church found across Canada. It requires a new perspective on leadership theologically, and a new approach functionally. This leads us into chapters three and four which are designated to deal with this question.

### **Chapter Three: Forming an Incarnational Leadership Model**

Having established how the doctrine of the Incarnation applies to, and even shapes the nature and ministry of the church, the next stage is to directly address the task that was laid out at the beginning of this thesis and develop a leadership model centered on the Incarnation. This model will be presented in the form of three key practices. They are: (1) The practice of personal mission, (2) The practice of hospitality and shared meals, and (3) the practice of Spirit led ministry. In shaping the incarnational leadership model there are two conditions that govern each of the three practices presented. The first condition is that each aspect of this leadership model must be consistent with the biblical witness for church leadership. This includes ensuring that the incarnational leadership model is in line with what was discussed in Chapter 1 with regards to the doctrine of the Incarnation, and with what was discussed in Chapter 2 regarding the incarnational church. In those chapters attention was given to unpacking a church that (1) identifies with the community, (2) contextualizes itself, and (3) sets itself as an alternative community. The first condition is also kept by looking for biblical examples illustrating an incarnational form of leadership in the early church. The second condition is that the model must be applicable for the 21<sup>st</sup> century Canadian church. At the onset of this thesis some time was devoted to describing where the Canadian church is as a whole. In particular, it was pointed out that there are some societal, and cultural changes that have proved quite challenging for perspectives and models of church leadership as currently constructed. An Incarnational model needs to be able to reflect a God driven approach to leadership that is responsive, and applicable to the setting of many Canadian church leaders. In order for this to happen leaders will have to engage in certain practices that

embody incarnational ministry. The following proposals can help to guide this kind of approach to leadership in the missional church.

### **The Practice of Personal Involvement in Mission**

The best place to begin in laying out the contours of an incarnational leadership model is with the need for the leader to be personally involved in mission. This perspective is the most important one to begin with as it sets the foundation for the remainder of the chapter. Later on this chapter and the next one will discuss the other roles of the incarnational leader, such as casting a missional vision for the church and equipping a congregation for incarnational ministry, however, none of these other roles will be meaningful unless the church leader is able to find a way to live in an incarnational manner in their own life.<sup>1</sup> This is demonstrated in the leadership of the early church. The book of Acts often depicts its leaders among the people of the day, and involved in mission in one capacity or another. In chapter 3, Peter and John are making their way to the Temple for the hour of prayer when they come across a man who is lame. They offer healing to the individual, and when the man is able to walk, and the people who have come to the temple notice, Peter and John use the opportunity to share further about Jesus. In chapter 5, all of the apostles upon their release from prison and persecution are involved in teaching and preaching in the temple courts, and from house to house. There is a sense that this is how everyday life was for the early church leaders; teaching at the temple to those who were interested, moving around from house to house,

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<sup>1</sup> Hirsch and Frost, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 221. This is similar to a position taken by the FORGE Mission Training Network where even those whose gifting may not be evangelistic/apostolic still participate in mission to have experience so that they may equip their congregation in a more meaningful way.

wherever they were accepted.<sup>2</sup> The previous chapter illustrated that the entire church is called to be a light to the nations, a calling that is for the entire body. If the responsibilities of leadership were removed from the discussion, then the logical extension is that leaders, as members of the body like any other, are to participate in God's mission because they too share in the incarnational identity of the church. Without sharing in that identity the leader risks become separated from the rest of the members.

With the above said, what does it look like for leaders to undergo this shift and bring mission into their personal life? Because of the diversity of North American ministry contexts there are countless approaches that have been taken. One approach which has been alluded to earlier is intentionally utilizing what is called third spaces. The term third space is coined to describe the place people go to when they are not at work, or home. It is a place to socialize with others, unwind, or engage in a hobby, and it can often become a place to develop community. This can be a coffee shop, community center, sports facility, arts center, or wherever people choose to gather.<sup>3</sup> Church leaders face a big risk of having their church become their third space. Whether one is a paid staff member, or lay leader, most of their free time becomes consumed within the church setting because so many activities (formal and informal) will take place there.<sup>4</sup> To take a step forward in incarnational leadership, leaders can do two things. First they can restructure, or clear aside time for activities that allow them to find a third space to begin investing in, and building relationships in. Second, they can relocate a church activity

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<sup>2</sup> DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 388.

<sup>3</sup> Frost, *Exiles*, 56.

<sup>4</sup> Frost, *Exiles*, 63. After adding up the various committee meetings, cell groups, youth and children activities it is not unheard of for leaders to be spending multiple weeknights, and significant chunks of the weekend at church.

such as a Bible study or small group into a coffee shop, restaurant, market square, or wherever people live. This way they can practice living incarnationally and be right amongst the people God is looking to bring salvation to.

Another approach finds staff leaders taking what is called a “bivocational” or “tent-making” approach to ministry. This approach is inspired by the Apostle Paul who actually made a living making tents (Acts 18:3).<sup>5</sup> A part of the recent interest in bivocational ministry structures is tied to a question that will be addressed in the final chapter, how can leaders support themselves in an incarnational leadership model? However, this approach really deserves mention here because it highlights the missional opportunities that are available in the everyday workplace.<sup>6</sup> While various workplace policies may provide resistance to missional activity, if we take the incarnation seriously then the workplace can still be seen as a venue for God to interact with people through the relationships that are built. This is perhaps just as valuable, but it also allows leaders to identify with the greater community as they can share in some of the experiences that are found in the workplace. Finally, leaders can bring mission into their own lives by heading up, or even participating in a ministry or service that the church offers to the community. In the previous chapter we considered how a given church might be blessed with resources, and human power to really bless and support their local community. The incarnational leader can look to such opportunities as a chance to regularly connect with and have a presence with the community.<sup>7</sup> A leader with an interest and passion in

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<sup>5</sup> Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 374. A tentmaker was also considered a leatherworker which identifies Paul as an artisan.

<sup>6</sup> McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, 154

<sup>7</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 141, Many churches are looking for ways to utilize their buildings for the community by considering opening the space for sports, learning centers, cafes and medical centers.



painting could help facilitate a weekly art night at the church where those in the community can have a free and safe space to practice their skills and relax. Even if the leader is not the most extroverted they can create an environment that can foster potential relationships through a shared interest. The principle behind this, and any approach of course is finding an avenue to connect with people, and incarnationally allow them to contact God through one's life.

### **The Practice of Hospitality and Shared Meals**

The next component of incarnational leadership is the shift towards practicing hospitality and sharing meals. On the surface this may seem less radical than other methods that were discussed earlier, but it is never the less just as important for leaders to incorporate. In fact, hospitality and sharing meals were a very important aspect to the life of the early church. Not only did the church meet in one another's houses where they broke bread together (Acts 2:46) but in the case of the Corinthian church, Paul encourages individuals to eat at the dinner table with unbelievers (1 Cor 8-10). This unique role of hospitality can partly be attributed to the Greco-Roman, and Palestinian culture of the New Testament. In this period it was more accepted to assist a stranger with food or housing than we are accustomed to today.<sup>8</sup> One great example can be found immediately after Paul's shipwreck on Malta. There he was met by the islanders, and given a place to stay for three days with Publius (Acts 28: 1-10).<sup>9</sup> In North America, our culture has developed to where we are less likely to even know our immediate neighbors, and become less trusting of others in general. Roxburgh and Romanuk cites The

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<sup>8</sup> Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, 156. He cites the unspoken code of Middle Eastern cultures where you invite a stranger in to feed them, clothe them, and help with provisions.

<sup>9</sup> Barton. *Hospitality*, 503.

Neighborhood Watch program as one example that illustrates this reality. Because the residents do not know and trust everyone in the community a program is developed to help create a safer environment, or at least assure everyone that their neighborhood is safe.<sup>10</sup> Though part of the reason we see the biblical church practicing hospitality so much is because of its historical context, the rest of it has to do with their understanding of the kingdom, and the grace that they have received from God.

The church would go beyond the standards of their culture when it came to hospitality and shared meals. More than just an evangelism strategy, it was a testimony to the power of God's grace, and a sign of the arrival of the Kingdom of God.<sup>11</sup> The essence of hospitality within the church is the gathering of people across social, economic, and even racial lines into one community. The place of hospitality and shared meals is prominent both in the teaching and ministry of Jesus. In the ministry of Jesus, one of the key characteristics was his willingness to eat with, and spend time with people, especially with those who would have seemed least worthy to enjoy his presence. Jesus stays at the house of a corrupt tax collector (Luke 19:1-9), and has dinner at the house of Levi with several tax collectors and sinner (Mark 2:12-17). In both cases the reaction of observers was outrage and disapproval. For Jesus the opportunity to spend time and build relationships over a meal is very crucial to his ministry. Luke reports that when the Pharisees accuse him of eating with sinners Jesus responds by saying "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31-32) Jesus could have eliminated this part of his ministry to

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<sup>10</sup> Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, 156. Another example would be how schools create a protective barrier to prevent any adult contact with children. Grandparents and friends cannot pick up the kids because of the fear that they may actually be a dangerous stranger.

<sup>11</sup> Frost, *Exiles*. 171.

establish better ties with the Pharisees. However it is clear that to Jesus, spending time over the dinner table is a means to people having the opportunity for repentance. This is evident in the case of Zacchaeus who becomes so overwhelmed by Jesus invitation to friendship and gracious actions towards him responds immediately by offering to give half of his possessions to the poor, and to pay back anyone whom he cheated four times the amount he cheated them of.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, when looking to model the Christian life after the incarnational life of Jesus that model must make room for hospitality and shared meals because of the focus that it had in Jesus ministry.

The early church adopted hospitality because of the example of Jesus, but also from some of the eschatological images in his teaching. In particular, there is one parable in which the kingdom of God is compared to a great banquet with an extraordinary amount of food, available to all who come (Luke 14: 15-24).<sup>13</sup> By using the feast imagery, salvation is therefore imagined as fellowship with the master, and enjoying the comforts provided by the master among others in the community.<sup>14</sup> It is within this eschatological understanding that the significance of hospitality, and shared meals for incarnational ministry takes root. Continuing first with the parable of the great feast, the task of delivering the banquet invitations to everyone to (the poor, the crippled, on the outskirts etc...) was by the servant. The servant is sent out three times to three different groups of people, to announce that the feast is ready, and in so doing he extends the hospitality of the master to all in the community.<sup>15</sup> If the master is to be understood as

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<sup>12</sup> Marshall, *Commentary on Luke*, 696.

<sup>13</sup> Marshall, *Commentary on Luke*, 586. The great supper is frequently used as a descriptor for salvation across the synoptic gospels.

<sup>14</sup> Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, 157.

<sup>15</sup> Marshall, *Commentary on Luke*, 588. Marshall's conclusion is that the servant could most likely be understood as the disciples, though there have been some who support that it is actually Jesus, stating that Luke chooses to change Matthew's plural description to a singular to make Jesus the servant.

Christ, the banquet as the Kingdom of God and the disciples as the servant, then this passage points out the important role of Jesus inviting people into the kingdom, and Christians who deliver the invitation and help direct people to the destination. For Paul's understanding of mission, this also means that Christ followers are to actually practice hospitality and share meals with non-Christians as well. Returning to the example of the Corinthian church, the marketplace would have been packed with meat that was sacrificed to pagan idols at the local temple. The sizeable Jewish population of Corinth ensured that there were merchants who made sure that there would be meat that was not sacrificed to an idol. However, if they were ever invited to dine at the home of anyone who was not part of the church or Jewish, than any meat they would eat would have been sacrificed to idols.<sup>16</sup> The issue that arose from this situation was the question; would Christians become spiritually tainted by eating the meat presented before them. Paul's guidance for the church (1 Cor 8-10) is centered on helping the Corinthians understand the freedom that comes in Christ, but throughout his response he makes it clear that there is an incarnational opportunity present at the dinner table.<sup>17</sup> At the climax of the discussion (1 Cor 10: 23-33) Paul encourages the church to eat and participate at the dinner table. He does provide some instruction on when it may be more appropriate to refrain from eating meat sacrificed to idols (v 27-28), but whether one eats or refrains from doing so, the guiding principle is to first glorify God in his decision, and secondly to look to build up the faith of others (Christian, Jew, or Greek). In Paul's view then,

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<sup>16</sup> DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 568. In Corinth the meal table was a place to begin friendships with neighbors, and enhancing ones personal connections (political, social, and business).

<sup>17</sup> Frost, *Exiles*, 165–166. The Freedom found in Christ according to Paul means that Christians cannot be contaminated spiritually by the pagan meat. The freedom offered in Christ is also a freedom from condemnation, and what is gained is the flexibility to make decisions that glorify God, and can be beneficial to others.

Christians should gladly practice hospitality at the dinner table where others can be drawn to the faith, freedom, and joy found in Christ as the Christian imparts that love of Christ over a meal.<sup>18</sup>

How then does the incarnational leader take steps towards making hospitality, and shared meals a growing focus in their ministry? Not surprisingly it begins with the leader, and their own dedication to showing hospitality, and communing with people over meals. As we discussed earlier Jesus spent time in his ministry to have dinners with tax collectors, and staying in the houses of sinners (Matt 11:19). For incarnational leaders a great starting point is to regularly have dinners with neighbors, co-workers, teammates, and friends at either the leader's home, or the home of the individual they are extending Christ's love to. Important to keep in mind is that the framework of incarnational living places an emphasis on forming relationships and building trust without an agenda to achieve an evangelistic goal. This means that the focus should be on listening to a neighbor's story, connecting over shared themes, and hopefully gaining trust to walk alongside of them in any of their challenges.<sup>19</sup> Hospitality also means embracing people at more than a physical level, but at an emotional and spiritual level. At the heart of hospitality and shared meals, is more than having food together, or sharing meals, it is about sharing life together. It is the mechanism that allows people to become comfortable, and willing to be honest and open with each other. Many of our favorite teachings from Jesus come from unplanned conversations, and spontaneous events.<sup>20</sup> Yet, because of his willingness to be there, it allowed for people to have a rich and impactful

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<sup>18</sup> Frost, *Exiles*, 167–168.

<sup>19</sup> Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, 157.

<sup>20</sup> Halter and Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom*, 161.

interaction with God. That does not mean that unless an extraordinarily deep moment occurs the meal time was pointless, but an incarnational leader is always looking for ways to extend hospitality from a spiritual and personal perspective as well.

The incarnational leader is also focused on creating a community of hospitality, a point that goes all the way back to the first church (Acts 2:46). As discussed earlier, hospitality is something that is shared, experienced and celebrated in a larger community. While a leader could desire to grow a hospitality ministry in the church because it is a reasonable outreach strategy (it is logical that people would more rather join a church that is hospitable than one that is not), an incarnational leader will also recognize how hospitality is also part of the very nature of the church.<sup>21</sup> This means that the leader is opening up their home to their own church, sharing a meal or playing a game. They are looking to continually go deeper in the relationships that they have started, even long after someone has proclaimed Jesus as Lord and Savior. Finally, the leader is active in equipping and providing resources so that the entire congregation can grow in this important practice. Chapter four will discuss in more depth the importance of the incarnational leader as an equipper, but for the time being it is worth stating that hospitality, like any other character trait and value is taught and built upon.<sup>22</sup> This can be done by modelling the trait, but also by passing down important insights and approaches that have been learned so that more members of the church may be able to open their lives to those around them, and live incarnationally through hospitality.

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<sup>21</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 41. Discipleship multiplication has become a popular approach for tying discipleship and mission together. Hirsch comments a bit on how the concept has changed from an institutional model, to an organic model that is based on biological cell replication.

<sup>22</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 166–173. The APEPT model from Ephesians 4:1-16 is one missional model that emphasizes the role of leader as an equipper for ministry.

## **The Practice of Spirit Led Leadership**

The first two practices described how an incarnational model of leadership requires the leader to join in the participation of God's mission. The final practice articulates how the incarnational leader actually leads others in embracing a missional outlook. A shift towards a Spirit led leadership captures how modeling the Incarnation transforms vision casting and organization in the church. At the center of this shift is recognizing the implication that the Holy Spirit dwells within each Christian, and thus each leader. As discussed in chapter two, the Incarnation is not just a ministry model lived by Jesus that the church needs to replicate, rather it is a statement that God is very much present in the life of the church, and its ministry. The ministry of the Spirit is multi-faceted but one of the ways that the biblical witness presents the Spirit is one who is very active when it comes to leadership. In the gospels the Spirit descends upon Jesus like a dove when he is baptized (Matt 3:16), and he would later state that the Spirit of the Lord is upon him as he fulfils what is spoken through the prophet Isaiah (Luke 4:18).<sup>23</sup> In Acts the Spirit is described as the one who sets apart elders at the church of Ephesus (Acts 20:28), he is responsible for gifting and empowering leaders (1 Cor 12:28), and even altering the course Paul would take in his missionary journeys by not allowing him to enter Asia (Acts 16:6-10). In light of this evidence it is crucial that an incarnational leadership model touches upon Spirit led ministry.

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<sup>23</sup> Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 37. Other instances of the Spirit in Jesus ministry include the Spirit leading Jesus into the wilderness to face temptation (Luke 4:14), his teaching that one needed to be born of the Spirit to know God, instruction to the disciples that the Spirit of their father would speak through them (Matt 10:20), and the promise of the Spirit as the greatest gift (Luke 11:12).

The first area to touch on is how incarnational leaders rely on the Spirit for leading and direction in the church. Commenting on the significance of communities of the Holy Spirit Dietterich describes the following:

“The church is not simply to discover the will of the community, but instead to discern together the will of God. It is the role of the Spirit to convict, convince, and lead those who profess faith in Jesus into God’s truth.”<sup>24</sup>

As a community of sent people, the key perspective is that congregations recognize that the Spirit leads them into unique places where they are to announce the kingdom of God. The specific type of mission, or ministry for each individual church is based on who is a part of the congregation, the distribution of gifts in the church, and the needs of the host community. A term that Will Mancini uses to describe this intersection between the needs of the community, and the strengths of the church is a church’s “Kingdom Concept.”<sup>25</sup> With this term, Mancini is articulating that each church has a unique calling for how they are called to represent the kingdom. For example, a church that has a lot of members with gifts for relating to youth and young adults as well as a sizeable number of immigrants or children of immigrants in their congregation may discover that their missional calling is to reach out to the growing number of foreign university students in their community.

While the entire church can discern God’s direction through listening to the Spirit, there is a critical role leadership plays in this process. First, while the trend in the missional church is to move away from having the leader(s) responsible for all of the visioning, and planning (a topic discussed in further depth in chapter four), it does still acknowledge that leaders are prominent and at the forefront of this process. In the

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<sup>24</sup> Ditterich, “Missional Communities,” 172.

<sup>25</sup> Mancini, *Church Unique*, 84–85. He defines the Kingdom Concept as the intersection between (1) local predicament, (2) collective potential, and (3) Apostolic spirit. A measurement for understanding why God might have a given congregation in a host community.



scriptures it is often the apostles, and church elders who are tasked with discovering God's leading over certain issues. We see this in the Jerusalem council where Peter, Paul, Barnabus, James, and the church elders came to discern God's direction concerning the Gentiles relationship with the Law (Acts 15). The implication of this is that the incarnational leader is committed to practicing the presence of God in discernment and is willing to learn, and be led by the Spirit personally. This means spending time searching through the scriptures, and theological traditions as well as drawing everything together in times of prayer. This means reflecting on how God has revealed himself in scripture and discerning that revelation against what the leader has seen firsthand occurring in the mission field. Following the Spirit also involves the unexplainable supernatural elements at play. Listening to Spirit is not a science by any means, but perhaps drawing once again from the church's decision to pursue the gentile mission can help paint the picture. As we look at Acts chapters 10-11 we can see that in one part of the picture Peter draws from his experience at Pentecost and concludes logically that if Gentiles speak in tongues, then that means God desires to bring salvation to the Gentiles. When the issue returns in the Jerusalem council (Acts 15), the apostles and elders take time to reflect and pray based on a wealth of information that is presented to them. On the more supernatural, unexplainable part of the picture, Peter receives a vision of food that was considered unclean by Jewish customs, and he is instructed to "kill" and "eat" (Acts 10:9-16). The vision is later interpreted and understood by Peter to be a message from God that the Gentiles are a part of his salvation plan, and that they not need to be considered as unclean anymore. While the process is never exactly the same, Leaders do need to grow in

the basic skills of reflection, discernment, and prayer to help them to evaluate what God may be specifically calling them, and their congregation to participate in.

The incarnational leader also vision casts by listening to their congregation. As discussed in chapter two, the Spirit is present in each member and therefore each person may receive divine insight for the rest of the congregation. Leaders ought to take the time to listen to these insights and stories from the different people in the congregation.<sup>26</sup> This can happen in a church wide discussion, but it can also occur over informal gatherings. The leadership can then weigh all of the insights received (including their own) and discern God's direction for the church. Thirdly, an incarnational model encourages leadership to draw on their personal experience from living missionally in the host community throughout the discernment process. Some traditional models might position leaders in a way that they are not very connected with their host community. For example, one model reported by Roxburgh is the "leader as manager." In this model the leader is a component in organizational strategies, market growth, and developing methodologies for meeting spiritual needs.<sup>27</sup> The downside is that the leader is spending so much time planning, administrating, and researching that it consumes all of their energy, and spares little time for the leader to engage and be a part of the host community. It makes it difficult to vision cast without actually tasting and experiencing the mission field. An Incarnational leader who does focus on personal mission has the ability to glean firsthand experience and information of how the Gospel is translating into

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<sup>26</sup> Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 104–105. Drawn from Browning's hermeneutical framework model.

<sup>27</sup> Roxburgh, "Missional Leadership," 199. The larger issue has been the development of professional clergy. The same example could apply to leaders who are tasked with writing sermons and bible studies that their entire focus is consumed by these tasks.

the host context, or how receptive people are to forming new relationships with the church is indispensable in that leadership is better able to identify with the community.<sup>28</sup> Therefore incarnational leadership is able to vision cast from a position that deeply understands and stands alongside the host community.

The second aspect of Spirit led ministry is recognizing that the Spirit utilizes leaders to become carriers, and developers of the church's missional ethos. Missional leadership literature has often discussed how a key task of leadership is to cultivate new missional culture, or ethos, and direct the church into mission. Alan Hirsch uses the term mDNA to describe this missional ethos and Alan Roxburgh uses the concept of missional imaginations.<sup>29</sup> Both terms are drawing upon the idea of how a missional ethos is something that is passed on or spread by the leadership. Hirsch's mDNA draws from the biological concept of how key properties of an individual are passed on to them through a genetic code while Roxburgh draws from the concept of how ideas and dreams can spread among people. For Hirsch, mDNA affects the entire outlook of the church including discipleship, establishing missional ministries, replicating leaders, the values of the church community, and even the structure of the church.<sup>30</sup> For Roxburgh and Romanuk, the perspective is that leaders are not meant to come up with all the answers for the congregation to follow, rather they "work the soil of the congregation so as to invite ... the people of God to discern what God is doing in, with, and among them as a

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<sup>28</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 153.

<sup>29</sup> In Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 76 Hirsch's use of mDNA (missional) draws from biology as an analogy to describe a built in coding for missional churches. He describes leaders as embedding and imparting mDNA. In Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, they use the term missional imagination to describe something that is cultivated and grown.

<sup>30</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 79. The specific categories according to Hirsch are disciple making, *communitas*, missional-incarnational impulse, apostolic environment, and organic systems.

community.”<sup>31</sup> It is not an easy process, requiring relationship building, time, and patience, as it places demands upon the leader to have humility. However, an incarnational leader understands that despite these challenges, it is worth it because it allows them to directly connect and work with their congregation members in discovering God’s purposes in their life. Regardless of which term one prefers, the underlying point is clear, missional leaders recognize, and carry missional values, or ethos and impart it to the rest of the congregation. The resulting outcome is that the entire congregation may know, and walk in God’s missional calling.

How does an incarnational leader do this? The beginning step is that incarnational leaders point the church towards the transformational power of Christ through the Spirit as the backbone of the church’s pursuit of a missional identity. We turn our attention back to the second chapter of Acts because there is no place that this point where this is more evident than the in description of the first church gatherings. Luke provides a description of a people who are living godly lives, sharing possessions with each other, and devoting their energies to worshipping God. He also mentions that one outcome is how others were being saved daily. However, nothing like this image is found earlier in Acts, or the book of Luke. The difference is what happens immediately before, the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost. Luke is being very intentional to illustrate that it is the work of the Spirit that establishes the church to live as a true reflection of what it means to be God’s children. Of course this thought is not limited to this passage alone. This point is also made elsewhere when Paul states that it is the power of the Spirit that draws people towards Christ (1 Co 2:4), and drives the process of transformation and

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<sup>31</sup> Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, 28.

equipping (Eph 4:12-16).<sup>32</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to acknowledge that passing on a missional culture cannot be done through leadership seminars, or step-by-step books. While these tools may be helpful they are inadequate by themselves. The apostle Paul instructs the Galatian church to trust the leading of the Spirit, as opposed to the way of the flesh, so that they will see the fruit of the Spirit grow and mature in their lives (Gal 5:17 The outcome of living by the Spirit is “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control” (Gal 5:22-23). In contrast, the outcome of living in the flesh is none of these things (Gal 5:19-21).<sup>33</sup> It is the key towards developing into an alternative community. The incarnational leader will point others to the work of the Spirit in their lives by leading by example, and by being transparent about their own weaknesses, allowing others to see how the Spirit has made them strong despite their shortcomings. The leader will also allow others to witness how the Spirit personally leads them in their actions, thoughts, and even perspectives as they are engaged in missional activities. Therefore the life of the leader will become the manual for missional living displaying not only the transformative work of Christ in their life, but also principles of the missional culture in action.<sup>34</sup> The church will be able to connect personally with how God may be calling the community to live out the missional ethos as they absorb the information from those already experienced in it.

## Summary

The Incarnational leader has a very different focus and approach from the way that Canadian church leadership has been practiced prior to the advent of the missional

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<sup>32</sup> Hastings, *Missional God, Missional Church*, 297.

<sup>33</sup> Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 251.

<sup>34</sup> Hirsch and Frost, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 219. Another term for this has been inspirational leadership.

church movement. An incarnational leader is primarily interested in leading the church towards its missional calling. This happens first as the leadership is willing to take time to personally involve themselves in mission, and live incarnationally in the community as Christ once did. They connect, and identify with members of the community, and allow their lives to be an encounter with the presence of God. An incarnational leader is also committed to the ministry of hospitality in their own lives, and within the church.

Hospitality was part of the backbone of the early church as it fosters an environment that is conducive to forming relationships. Hospitality would also be a reflection of the Kingdom God, and God's embracing love that is extended to us as we are welcomed into his communion. Finally, incarnational leadership is a Spirit led ministry recognizing that God's presence is with the leader. This means that they rely on the Spirit for vision casting and the direction of the church, as well for equipping and discipling. This model will change the priorities and attention that church leaders give to their work, and as a result it will require even more shifts to occur amongst the entire church to make it happen.

## **Chapter Four: Incarnational Leadership Structures**

In the previous chapter we examined the key values of leadership that are based on the doctrine of the Incarnation. However, there remains one important question that must be addressed; how can a leader possibly incorporate all of the new responsibilities that are called for in the incarnational leadership model without burning out? Most leaders (paid staff or lay leaders), would quickly point out that there are already enough demands placed on them in their ministry. If they are to spend more time and energy on living incarnationally in personal mission, practicing hospitality, and visioning the missional direction of God with the congregation, then what will happen to everything else? The reality is that the shifts outlined in the previous chapter cannot occur unless there are adjustments made to the overall ministry philosophy of the church. This chapter will explore how adjustments to ministry philosophies and structures can not only accommodate an incarnational leadership model, but allow the model to flourish in the Canadian church. The themes that will be discussed include: (1) leading at the front, (2) shared leadership structures, and (3) the priesthood of all believers. Along with highlighting many of the practical considerations that make these practices so relevant, there will also be some attention paid to articulating how many of the structural shifts have strong biblical foundations. In fact, many of the themes that are discussed will lead us back into the discussion of the incarnational church in chapter two, and they will also lead us back into a deeper exploration of some of the points raised in chapter one. In this way this chapter serves as something more than just a practical application of the various challenges of implementing an incarnational leadership model. It closes the loop by also

pointing out how shifting the leadership model can be directly tied with shifting the focus of the church into a missional and incarnational orientation.

### **Leading at the Front**

The first structural shift that needs to be explored is the emergence of the concept of "leading from the front."<sup>1</sup> Previously, the church has commonly adopted a hierarchal, or top down leadership model. In the birth of Christendom, the shape of leadership placed power in the hands of the clergy. They were different from the members of the congregation as they alone would dispense the sacraments of grace, administer liturgy, and observe what was considered to be higher morals such as celibacy. In the post enlightenment period the concept of "professionalism" began to take shape and clergy were considered to be the educated and formally trained individuals who were thus especially capable of ministry.<sup>2</sup> More recently, the fading Christendom model of leadership has evolved into a business model where the senior pastor operates in the role of CEO, and other pastors act as executives or managers beneath them who in turn oversee lay involvement.<sup>3</sup> This model has placed church leaders behind desks, facilitating various administrative and managerial duties, but further away from grassroots ministry and functions, and even further away from the life of the host community. In this model, there is simply too much work to facilitate all of the programs and services for the pastor or leader to take on some of the more incarnational activities that were discussed earlier.

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<sup>1</sup> Roxburgh, "Missional Leadership," 212. This is a term that comes from the leadership model presented in this chapter. It has since become heavily influential within the missional church writings.

<sup>2</sup> See Roxburgh, "Missional Leadership," 190–198. for a brief summary on the shape of Christendom leadership. He also dissects further the movement of professionalism into leadership as manager, counsellor, and technician.

<sup>3</sup> Hirsch and Frost, *The Shaping of Things to Come*. 212.



For incarnational leadership to work the leaders must no longer be positioned at the top of a hierarchical leadership pyramid. Instead they must be leading from the front, or at the point of a missional arrow. While this understanding of leadership is crucial to mission it has actually been under development since the beginning of the missional church movement. Alan Roxburgh's chapter "Missional Leadership" in the influential book *Missional Church* presents a model that has set the foundation for most missional church structures.<sup>4</sup> This model takes into account the church's nature as a covenant community and the biblical call of the church to reach out into its specific context. In this model leaders are positioned at the front of the congregation to (1) "call into being a covenant community," and (2) to point and direct the church body into their respective host community.<sup>5</sup> These two focus points of the leadership vision essentially align with everything that was said about incarnational leadership earlier in this thesis. In this model leaders are encouraged to spend time visioning how the church becomes incarnate in its community, as well as being on the ground to participate, discern and even pioneer the mission. They are also to focus their efforts on discipleship, and building up the church into maturity as they experience personally the reality of the kingdom, but also so that they may join in with God's mission as well. It is also a model that simultaneously reduces the maintenance roles in the church such as program development and administrative oversight. This is not to say that these items are to be eliminated, the

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<sup>4</sup> See Roxburgh, "Missional Leadership," 201–220 for a complete description of the missional leadership structure. Note, this leadership structure is woven into an overall church model.

<sup>5</sup> Roxburgh, "Missional Leadership," 212. The summary point actually states that the leader "lives into and incarnates the missional, covenant future of God's people."

values of the model simply inspire the formation of an approach that is less concerned, or worried about maintaining what is already happening.<sup>6</sup>

Practically speaking, leading from the front reorients the daily activities of the church leadership, as well as their underlying focus. One way to understand the concept of leading from the front is to compare the task of missional leadership to that of explorers discovering new lands. An Explorer seeks to understand unexplored lands and provide valuable information for those who may follow. The task is hands on, involving a bit of risk, and one of adventure. Church leadership at the front requires venturing into the various Canadian communities and subcultures, understanding the pulse of those people. As much as church leadership has need to develop skill for providing pastoral care, leaders will grow skills in relationship building and cross-cultural communication. Leaders will also grow in skills that seek to communicate and illustrate the kingdom of God. More time is required outside the church walls and in the community serving, and ministering to people.<sup>7</sup> After all, this is the incarnational ministry model that Jesus presents to us. Jesus spent a majority of his time ministering from town to town, in and among the people. Even in his commissioning of his disciples, they were sent out to announce the coming of the kingdom (Luke 10:1-21). The piece of the picture is that the incarnational leader is leading at the front so that they may be knowledgeable, and able to equip and guide the rest of the congregation into mission as well. The equipping role of incarnational leaders will be discussed more under the final sub point of this chapter, but it is worth stating here that unless leadership has experienced the nuances of the

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<sup>6</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 178. This is especially true at different points in a churches lifestyle. Even a very organic incarnational ministry can mature and require administration or program development which will actually help it progress.

<sup>7</sup> Roxburgh, "Missional Leadership," 210.

missional needs of their communities, then it will be very difficult to equip and send others into mission as well.

A development that has contributed to the discussion on leading from the front, is the conversation in missional church literature that seeks to diversify the current leadership approach, and highlight some biblical leadership profiles that would be described as frontline. Specifically, the frontline leadership profiles that have been discussed are the NT apostle, prophet, and evangelist. This conversation emerged from the observation that the Canadian/ North American church really only favors one of the many biblical leadership models: the pastor/teacher model.<sup>8</sup> This is what is expected of paid ministry staff in most local congregations: preach a sermon, lead Bible studies or Sunday school classes, and offer pastoral counselling and discipleship. Though vital to the health and care of the church, exclusively emphasizing the pastor/teacher roles neglects several leadership roles that are specifically important when it comes to guiding the local church into becoming missional and incarnational. Frost and Hirsch offer a model that they refer to by using the acronym APEPT as a short form for the roles of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher found in Paul's letter to the Ephesians (Eph 4:11). In this leadership model they state that all five leadership roles, and not just the pastor/teacher roles are crucial for the church. They describe the role of the apostle as pioneering new missional ventures, the role of the prophet as discerning and communicating spiritual reality for furthering God's mission, and the role of the evangelist as communicating the gospel accordingly based on the context and setting of

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<sup>8</sup> Hastings, *Missional God, Missional Church*. 297.

the host community.<sup>9</sup> From this description these leadership functions have an outward focus: venturing into new communities, learning about and understanding the community, discerning God's direction, and communicating about who Jesus is in a meaningful way. These characteristics share some of the notable characteristics of the incarnational leader, and church that was discussed in chapters two and three. Looking deeper into the roles of each leadership function reveals that many of the tasks done by these types of leaders are indeed either absent, or very minimal in modern churches. However, this should not be the norm according to Paul's instruction to the Ephesian church (Eph 4:11). In this passage Paul writes that Christ has given all five ministry offices (apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher) to the church, that this leadership formation is to allow the church to be built up, have unity in the faith, become mature, and have the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:12-14). Therefore a healthy church should have this more even distribution of leadership offices within it than is often found in many traditional churches. Without any of these five ministries the ability to bring forward God's mission becomes far more difficult.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that some leaders are to specialize, and to place a majority of their efforts in some of these incarnational functions such as pioneering missional endeavors, discerning God's direction, and communicating the gospel.

The only real weakness of the APEPT ministry model is that it may compartmentalize people into a ministry role a bit too much. Can a leader be a leader without a strong gifting in one of the fivefold ministry offices? Can a pastor or teacher be

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<sup>9</sup> Please see Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 169 for a more indepth breakdown of the 5 fold ministry functions.

<sup>10</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 158.

an incarnational leader? Can a church be incarnational without a strong apostolic leader? While the APEPT model inspires new types of leaders that the church desperately needs, the picture is incomplete since it does not provide a broader vision for how all types of leaders can grow in incarnational ministry. If no one on the leadership team is very strong with apostolic gifting it is still possible for that leadership to pioneer new missional works, a task done by the apostle according to Frost and Hirsch. Therefore the best approach would be to not adopt this model too stringently. Van Gelder provides one such example of a more general approach to leadership in *The Ministry of the Missional Church*. His model calls for visionary leadership that discerns the role of programs, people, communication, facilities and finances.<sup>11</sup> His model does not specify more defined roles such as APEPT, but it does find some common ground for leading through Spirit-led discernment. For Van Gelder this means that leaders are to engage in theological reflection, discern with God and the scriptures, and draw from their own knowledge of the host community.<sup>12</sup> These descriptors match very well with how we presented what leading from the front is because Van Gelder recognizes that first and foremost it is the Spirit working at the front to provide a revelation of God's will in scripture, and on applying it in mission within the host community. In order for the leader to discern God's direction for the church, they need to join God at the front. This involves observing and attending to the congregation and host community, prayerfully discerning and reflecting, and being involved in the implementation and assessment stages in order to obtain direct

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<sup>11</sup> See Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 152. For the full leadership and organizational model

<sup>12</sup> Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 108.

feedback or insight for how the church is engaging with its neighbors.<sup>13</sup> This approach still emphasizes many of the incarnational elements found in the apostle, prophet, and evangelist roles. However, this leadership orientation does not have to be confined to those with certain gifts; rather it is a posture that is chosen by leaders to relate to their congregations and host community in such a way.

### **Shared Leadership Models**

The previous section helped address some of the questions that began this chapter by validating that a new orientation for leadership is founded on sound reasoning and biblical principles. However, in order to really address some of the workload questions the discussion must turn towards shared leadership, or team based leadership models. Most Canadian and North American church leadership models employ what is called the *solus pastor*. This model features one individual who is responsible for teaching, pastoral care, overseeing committees and the administration of the church.<sup>14</sup> As alluded to above, the challenge with this approach is that it leaves little time for growing towards more incarnational ministries. A part of the solution is that the leadership should shift to a shared responsibility among a team. This is not just a pragmatic idea, it is actually reflective of the kind of leadership that we find in the New Testament as well. Returning to the passage in Ephesians, Paul is quite explicit in saying that all five leadership functions are active and working together in unity for the good of the church.<sup>15</sup> This vision looks at leadership from a more egalitarian perspective. Paul does not write that God gave a single leader to build up the church, or that responsibility falls on one person,

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<sup>13</sup> Van Gelder. *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 118. This is summarized from his discernment process guide which has five stages: attending, asserting, agreeing, acting, and assessing.

<sup>14</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 177.

<sup>15</sup> Frost and Hirsch. *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 168. Taken from the theology of APEPT.

but rather a collection of leaders. This is consistent with what is seen elsewhere in the NT. In Paul's farewell to Ephesian church during his return to Jerusalem, he always interacts with a group of elders, never one main elder (Acts 20:28). The decision on whether Gentiles should follow the Law of Moses was not discerned by a single person, but famously by the Jerusalem council, a group of apostles and elders (Acts 15).<sup>16</sup> Additionally, in most of the letters written to churches, leadership is most commonly referred to as a group (1 Pet 5:1-4, Heb 13:7). From this brief overview of the text it seems as though the early church was able to share the burdens more evenly amongst a team of leaders.

An important strength of shared leadership teams is that diversity is increased, and so are the spiritual gifts that become available. On top of general time restrictions, there are also gifting limitations to consider. One person is simply not great at everything under the sun. Earlier the APEPT model revealed that there are five leadership functions that make up the ministry team. In addition to these gifts, there are also others such as exhortation, mercy, healing, and administration along with many others (Rom 12:6-8, 1 Cor 12:28).<sup>17</sup> Paul's word to the Corinthian church is that the entire church (not just leaders) is made up of many parts, and that each part has something invaluable to contribute.<sup>18</sup> Wrapped in a backdrop of abuse for spiritual gifts, and the crippling pride among the Corinthians, Paul's words speak about humility, diversity, and a focus towards what is greater. There is no reason why this approach should not also be applied towards leadership. Regardless of which model one chooses, the point is that the influx of new

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<sup>16</sup> Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 364. The role of discussion and debate to achieve consensus was quite common for Jewish leadership.

<sup>17</sup> Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 478.

<sup>18</sup> DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 571.

gifts that are available through having a team approach positions the church to be more responsive to new challenges, and missional ventures. It is fine now for a pastor/teacher to have some weakness. If the church decides that it is called to pioneer a new youth center this venture will not necessarily rest upon the pastor/teacher to succeed, there will be someone else with a more apostolic gifting, and maybe with a strength for communicating with challenged youth. For the leader who is not strong in that type of ministry, it can become a burden that becomes too difficult to handle, which can result in the ministry collapsing, and even apathy forming towards future missional opportunities that will present themselves because of the past failure.<sup>19</sup> In a team model not only will someone who is more suited and prepared to lead in that area be given the opportunity, but it also allows the other leaders to find the missional voice that God is giving them. They can still interact with the at risk youth, but instead as supporters and teammates as opposed to carrying the burden.

Having identified that the biblical norm is to have leadership teams, and shared leadership how might that practically work today for incarnational leaders. Avenue Community Church in Toronto values bi-vocational pastors so that staff members can be around non-Christians more often, and connect with the missional challenges of a workplace that are present among the congregation. Though average attendance on Sunday mornings is approximately 80 people, they have 8 staff members, all part time with the church, who have either a full-time, part-time or freelance job outside the church. Because the leadership team is so large for the size of the church the tasks and responsibilities can be well distributed so that each leader is able to continue in their

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<sup>19</sup> Roxburgh, *The Missional Leader*, 112.



regular job(s). While not every church may want to pursue bi-vocational ministry, this example does make it clear that having a strong team will open up the time and freedom for missional activities. A church could conceivably have a more traditional staffing setup, but they are also partnered with lay leaders to form a leadership team that together discerns the direction of the church. This is not a hierarchal setup where the staff pastor assigns tasks to the lay leaders, but a team which brings all their gifts to the table, and is mutually submissive to each other to follow God's instructions.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the question is not so much about traditional versus emerging, but how does a team leadership model work for that specific church?

### **The Priesthood of all Believers**

The third and final structural shift that ushers in a setting for an incarnational leadership model to flourish is a theological, and practical concept that is by no means new at all, and that is bringing renewed focus and priority to the priesthood of all believers. In short, this point expresses that the entire church (not a select few) are a royal priesthood who have been set apart to worship God, and participate in his mission "declaring his praises" (1 Pet 2:9).<sup>21</sup> This universal call upon each church member that Peter expresses was already unpacked in more detail when discussing the nature of the church as sent people in chapter two, but it is worth recalling that this belief is not really reflected in the actions of most Canadian churches. Instead of a community that pulls together and pursues the kingdom of God as one body, a typical Sunday service has the

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<sup>20</sup> McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, 134. It is important to keep in perspective that clergy as we know it did not exist in the New Testament. Leaders were leaders not because of their pay, but due to their kingdom assignment.

<sup>21</sup> Hastings, *Missional God, Missional Church*, 214–215.

minority ministering to the crowd of Christians.<sup>22</sup> If churches were to take the confession of the priesthood of all believers seriously then the ratio would swing towards a greater percentage of the congregation becoming active in ministry. The result would be that the leadership could depend on the commitment, and spiritual maturity of the entire body to live missionally, and even carry some of the load. It is this thought that takes this section to its very core; the responsibility of leadership is no longer about how much they feed their members, or how well they run the programs. It is about how they enable their congregation to live incarnationally in accordance with God's specific vision for them. Van Gelder and Zscheile describe it well when they say that leadership is to "cultivate and steward the faithful participation of the whole community and its gifts in God's mission."<sup>23</sup> The question then is, how does the incarnational leader tackle this goal?

The first component that incarnational leadership should consider is cultivating church gatherings that actually have the body supporting, exhorting, and guiding each other. If the church is called to be missional, engage its community and build relationships so that it can minister to the hearts of those people with the gospel, then they need to experience this within their own church as well. However, the effect of consumerism, and the creation of consumer driven churches has limited this formation opportunity as the majority of the time people are in the position of an observer.<sup>24</sup> In the early church it was a different story. There was plenty of reciprocal action. They were consistently giving to each other, examining the apostles teachings (Act 2:42-47),

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<sup>22</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 44. His reporting on current worship formats (traditional pulpit, platform and program) will result in approximately 90–95% of the congregation to become passive in that time.

<sup>23</sup> Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 155.

<sup>24</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 45. The issue with consumerism is that church is reduced to how good the program or sermon is. A church is evaluated on these areas, and discipleship becomes more difficult.

bringing divine insights to the group through sharing songs, hymns, prophetic words, and words of instruction. (1 Cor 14: 26-28) Therefore in any given gathering it looks like there was intention to interact, grow together, and extend grace to each other. For incarnational churches the basic framework of the church gatherings will need to adjust. There can be a time to pray for one another that is built into the time together. There can be discussions based on sermons that challenge the congregation to learn together and ask important questions.

Elevation church in Waterloo Ontario is a church that is intentional about engaging and growing together as a community. In many ways their formal church gathering is not too different from that of any other church. What is interesting is that after the service concludes there are tables to gather together for coffee, and questions about the sermon to discuss. The culture among the church is such that this discussion happens automatically, and one can openly join any group for a healthy and deepening discussion. Another church called The Table in Winnipeg gathers in a bar just outside the downtown core.<sup>25</sup> They have a very informal gathering that welcomes any who might come in, and they take time for discussions within the sermon. The most interesting part of their service is that the Lord's Supper is available the entire time sitting on the table for anyone to take. In both examples the church environment has formed a culture where the church is keeping watch for each other, and helping one another with some of the challenges they are facing.

The second component that is involved in taking the priesthood of all believers seriously is the role of leadership in equipping the congregation for mission. To

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<sup>25</sup> Stiler and Metzger, *Going Missional*, 57.

understand this point we return to Ephesians chapter four where Paul lays out the responsibilities of leadership. Here Paul writes that leaders are to “equip his (Christ’s) people for good works so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Eph 4:12). Just as we previously discussed above, this passage is also clear that the ministry of the church is not the primary responsibility of leaders alone. Paul is explicit in saying that it is the works of *all* of God’s people that will built up the church. The responsibility of leaders is to equip the church for this task.

One place where equipping is very important is in the area of spiritual gifts. Each member of the body of Christ has been gifted in a unique way which allows them to contribute to the rest of the body and the missional call of the church. Leaders are called to help the members of the church discover their gifts and learn how to use them, while also watching out for challenges related to that gift as well. Frost and Hirsch offer an example of what this might look in their APEPT model. In this model, which they base on Ephesians four they see the congregation broken down into the five roles of APEPT.<sup>26</sup> This means that there will be a group in the congregation that has an evangelistic gifting, another group with a gifting in teaching and so on. In this picture the leaders are equipping others in the area of gifting that they are confident in on a continual basis. For example, an individual with a pastoral gift would be looking to raise up and equip others in the church who have the pastoral gift. In some churches requiring a more defined structure such as St John’s in Sheffield, they have actually redeveloped their entire discipleship plan so that there is a method to help each person find their gifting area, and

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<sup>26</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 171. They make this claim on the reasoning that Paul is addressing the letter to the entire church of Ephesus. Therefore Paul would be alluding to all who were reading that they are a part of the ministry in one of these five capacities.

then develop a training equipping program that is focused on different gifts.<sup>27</sup> Similar to the critique in chapter two, the APEPT model does miss the mark by not focusing on the many other spiritual gifts listed in the NT that leaders can equip their congregation members in. Therefore, there must be attention given towards gifts such as hospitality, helps, and exhortation as well the rest of the spiritual gifts outlined in the NT. Leaders can take advantages of many comprehensive gifting assessments available that include all of the spiritual gifts, and help them to understand how they are gifted, and how they can equip others in those gifting areas.<sup>28</sup> The end goal will not only allow the incarnational leader to shift the ministry to the congregation, but it will also help enable the congregation as a whole to grow in missional participation.

The other area for equipping is personal character, and what might be more commonly considered as discipleship. This would include equipping people to learn how to leave behind the sin and brokenness that might be plaguing them, it can also include digging through sensitive parts of the past or even dealing with personal doubts and fears.<sup>29</sup> The importance of character is that someone may be incredibly gifted, but if they bring their fears, angers and baggage into the mix then it could be potentially dangerous. One of the ways that Incarnational leaders will achieve this is by leading from example, a subject that was touched upon in chapter three. To explore this subject a bit further we must remember just how much Jesus' influence and discipleship came from how he lived by example. A major theme from the first chapter was that his leadership by example was

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<sup>27</sup> Frost and Hirsch. *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 173.

<sup>28</sup> See the Ford, *Your Leadership Grip* for an example of a comprehensive spiritual gift assessment tool.

<sup>29</sup> Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*. 163. This needs to be balanced with the reminder that no person will completely rid themselves of sin, and that transformation is a journey that can take some time in certain cases.

so strong that people were able to see God's glory through his life. For Incarnational leaders, the most important aspect of living by example is living with authenticity. Roxburgh and Romanuk report that much of the disconnection found in congregations today comes when they are unable to match words with actions.<sup>30</sup> Sermon illustrations, and shared stories are helpful, but if someone truly wishes to understand what kindness or forgiveness looks like nothing surpasses being able to see it with one's own eyes. This does not mean that the leader needs to be the perfect Christian who does everything right. On the contrary it is actually best when the leader is willing to open up about their failures and illustrate to the congregation how God has helped, or is helping them to overcome their weakness. Roxburgh and Romanuk illustrates this point by referring to a Midwest church of individuals in their twenties and thirties where a pastor's openness is actually cited by congregation members as the single most effective means at helping them grow in their spirituality. They are drawn to authenticity because it allows them to have trust in a church that identifies with the problems they are likely facing, but they also have a model to see how God might work in them as well.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, congregation members who are developed in their gifting, and mature spiritually will be able to help lessen the load for leadership while simultaneously experiencing growth in their own lives.

## Summary

What this chapter has shown is just how connected the formation of incarnational leadership is within the formation of an incarnational church. What this chapter also shows is how it is possible to create incarnational structures that will allow leadership to

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<sup>30</sup> Roxburgh and Romanuk, *Missional Leader*, 132.

<sup>31</sup> Roxburgh and Romanuk, *Missional Leader*. 132.

take on the new model without carrying too large of a burden on their shoulders. As the church shifts, adopts, and grows into its missional identity, the right environment for this model of leadership is created. Therefore, Canadian churches in the 21<sup>st</sup> century need to begin imagining how these shifts can be implemented within their own unique settings. This will include adopting leadership philosophies and structures which place an emphasis on leading at the front. Doing so will encourage leaders to make it a focus to be engaged in the host community, and live incarnationally among the people. Shared leadership models distribute the burden of leadership that was once upon a single individual onto a team, increasing the missional capabilities for all. The diversity that comes from the new gifts that are present at the leadership table also allows leaders to be more intentional in pursuing the ministries they feel God is calling them into. Finally, the priesthood of all believers is renewed so that the entire church is active in ministering and participating in the mission of the church. Leaders do inspire missional change in a community, but they also need support from the congregation to grow as incarnational leaders. This model of leadership reflects the shape of leadership that God is calling in the church, but it also produces a church that is more ready to take on the exciting, and challenging mission field that is Canada.

## **Conclusion**

Through the course of this thesis we have explored how a leadership model can be formed on the doctrine of the incarnation, what this model looks like, and why it is important for the 21<sup>st</sup> century church in Canada. An incarnational leadership not only addresses some of the immediate practical challenges facing a church, such as how the church and Christians can live missionally in a society that seems content with ignoring Christianity. It also helps leaders identify a deeper theological understanding of the role and purpose of church leadership in a post- Christendom society. Incarnational ministry opens the door for our communities to have authentic encounters with the Christian faith and an incarnational leadership model really does place leaders in a great position to engage with communities, and lead churches into God's missional calling for their congregations. However, an incarnational approach to leadership is not the norm for the Canadian church, and some churches are remarkably still operating from a Christendom worldview. The fact of the matter is that there is still a lot of work remaining to do before we see an incarnational model for church leadership becoming the norm. As we conclude it is essential that we explore some steps that will aid in implementing an incarnational leadership model. It is also helpful to identify what some of the challenges are, and what is required in order to transition to this type of a leadership structure.

The first step that is required is to grow the number of practical resources available to pastors and churches who would be seriously interested in applying an incarnational leadership model. Currently, the missional church movement, and any leadership discussions within it are still mostly academic. This is mostly a reflection of the relatively young age of the movement, but it is something that needs to be addressed.



For example, lack of material aimed towards pastors was a part of the motivation of *Missional Leader*.<sup>1</sup> Fortunately that book, and several others are changing the trend, and hopefully this thesis can contribute in some way to the discussion as well. As the discussion is refined it will hopefully develop so that an even deeper understanding of incarnational ministry and leadership will form, with more direct applications for different sub-cultures and regions.

The second thing which is very important is helping the Canadian church to address some of the fears associated with all things missional. There is a significant fear in some sectors of the church when it comes to breaking from established Christendom models. For some, the Christendom model is God's intended will for the church, for others there is fear that shifting to an external, incarnational focus will fail to grow the church, and alienate those who are used to an internal program focused church.<sup>2</sup> For church leaders, adopting an incarnational approach dramatically changes how ministry is done. It means taking a chance, having to adapt and pushing out of one's comfort zone. What happens if they are not cut out for the task? Will it mean that they might have to leave the ministry? The reality is that shifting to an incarnational leadership model and missional church approach is not the easiest, or most stable task to accomplish, and most writers acknowledge that the transition takes time.<sup>3</sup> Therefore the fears are legitimate, and the questions are important. There are numerous ways to possibly address the fears, and probably not all methods will work for all churches or individuals. One important step is to revisit the biblical and theological roots of an incarnational model, just as we

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<sup>1</sup> Roxburgh and Romanuk, *Missional Leader*, 4.

<sup>2</sup> McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Mancini, *Church Unique*, xxi-xxviii.

have in the first chapter of this thesis. Sometimes courage can be found knowing that God has laid out such ideas in the scriptures for us, and that it is not about jumping onto another trend. Another step that can be taken to alleviate some of the fears is to join a local network committed to travelling the same journey. It is not up to a single church to figure out how to make adjustments all on their own. Ideas, encouragements, and accountability can be found through such meaningful partnerships. The TrueCity movement in Hamilton is an example of such a network where churches come together for a common goal, and find ways to support each individual church's efforts, as well as the goals of the unified body of Christ.<sup>4</sup> There are also numerous other ways to alleviate fears including taking time to go through some books on the subject, learning the story of a church that was in a similar position, or even launching a starter ministry that tests out some of these incarnational principles without having the entire church have to dramatically change to accommodate. In the end, the best thing to do about these fears is building church relationships, and seeing God in action.

Finally, another step that needs to be taken is to begin developing leaders with a vision for the incarnational leadership approach at the outset of their ministries. It is very difficult, if not impossible for a young leader to go to Bible College, then Seminary, and land a pastoring position and expect to be ready to lead incarnationally right away. As Christianity drifts from the mainstream of Canadian society young leaders need to guard against becoming disconnected from the mission field around them because of all time they spend in Christian environments (school, placements with churches, etc...). Educational systems can also respond to this challenge by evolving to incorporate more

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<sup>4</sup> Goheen, *A Light to the Nations*, 226.

training for young leaders (and older leaders switching into vocational ministry) in the area of mission.<sup>5</sup> What might also be helpful for younger leaders, especially those interested in *bi-vocational* ministry would be to take advantage of their formative years and learn a skillset that would help them gain employment in a field that they might be interested at working in for a while. It is certainly much more difficult to go through the education and accreditation at a later life stage.

While it may take a lot of hard work, and some dramatic changes to how the Canadian church understands both itself and its ministry, implementing an incarnational leadership model is by no means impossible. In fact, as we discovered in our final chapter on incarnational leadership structures, some churches are already pursuing, pioneering, and living this model out. Indeed, the doctrine of the incarnation is not a confession that is meant to be hidden away in the deep confines of theology texts. Rather, it exists as one of the primary biblical revelations that informs the church of God's missional nature. It is a powerful message that Jesus chose, to live amongst the sinfulness and imperfection of humanity so that we may witness his glory, and be redeemed. The immediate goal of this thesis, as stated at the beginning was to explore how this message known as the incarnation can inform the shape and ministry of Canadian church leadership. In pursuing this goal we have laid out that the incarnation is indeed a very important paradigm for the call of church, and its leaders according to the NT writers. The NT writers testified that the incarnation, and the mission of God continues through the presence of the Spirit, and the inspiration/model of Jesus. The incarnation matters to the church today, because this call is still upon us. As we argued, it encourages the church to see God as present and

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<sup>5</sup> Van Gelder, *The Missional Church and Leadership Formation*, 187.

active in mission, instructing us to abandon the belief that mission is a burden to carry alone. It also provides a framework to the church and leaders about the important points of mission, such as dwelling in the community, contextualization, and forming alternative communities. Indeed the incarnation does point towards a new expression of church, and new insights for how leaders are to lead within it.

It is these more practical elements of the discussion that need to be offered as a way to conclude. While expanding and growing the conversation surrounding the incarnation, mission and leadership is important and necessary, the driving force behind it all is the belief that a leadership model formed upon the incarnation has the potential to positively push the church towards. The incarnation takes leadership away from internally focused ministry tasks such as programming and administration and reorients them towards the frontline of God's missional activity. It allows leaders to have the space and focus to connect and identify with their communities, and see God at work alongside them, and the rest of the church. It also provides the leadership with a stronger avenue for discipleship, especially in the area of mission. Leaders are able to journey and venture alongside their congregations as they join God in the neighborhood together. The big picture of course is that hopefully many communities and individuals might have the opportunity to meet God, when they might not have if the church continues to operate with a Christendom perspective. While there is a lot to be done to take us there, an Incarnational leadership model will definitely need to be a part of the journey for the Canadian church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

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