

## After Modernity, What? Our Context For Doing Missional Ecclesiology

### Introduction: *The Question*

Brian McLaren's *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix*

So what does it look like to conceive of a Christianity in another way that's not modern? "Can you imagine what happens to the church, the whole Christian enterprise, when it has so thoroughly accommodated to modernity – so much so that it has no idea of any way Christianity could exist other than a modern way?"<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Oden's, *After Modernity, What?*

Where did we get the twisted notion that orthodoxy is essentially a set of ideas rather than a living tradition of social experience? Our stereotype of orthodoxy is that of frozen dogma, rather than a warm continuity of human experience--of grandmothers teaching granddaughters, of feasts and stories, of rites and dancing. Orthodoxies are never best judged merely by their doctrinal ideas, but more so by their social products, the quality of their communities... They await being studied sociologically, not just theologically.<sup>2</sup>

The cliché of "re": Doug Pagitt's *Church Re-imagined...*, Driscoll's "Reformation...", Chester and Timms "Reshaping...", *Re-turn to ??, Retrieval of ?? etc*

- As much a protest as it is a search that dares to imagine spirituality and church practice no longer western facing and modernist.

### A. The Moderns And The Reactionary Search For A Trans-Modern Spirituality and Ecclesiology

#### I. The Acids of Modernity:

The date was April 6, 1966. And the ominous red and black cover-page of *Time Magazine* boldly inquired, "*Is God Dead?*"

The culprit acids of modern secularism:

- Market place pragmatism and supply-demand capitalism;
- The rising prestige of the natural sciences with its corresponding empiricist based sage;
- And a desensitized spirituality formed out of an increasingly bureaucratized and techno-urban socialization that shielded us from the agrarian forces that at once made God more believable, if not more useful.

But of particular importance to our narrative, was the reductionism reflected in both enlightenment generated *individualism* and *rationalism*.

Traced back to Rene Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*, with an emphasis on "first" (underline mine).

The Cartesian revolution basically turned pre-modern thinking on its head by asking FIRST what pre-modernity asked LAST. For if in pre-modern philosophy (Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, etc) the first question was "what is real" then "how do I know it" and finally, "how can I be certain that I know it,"

Descartes reversed the order. Before asking what we are trying to know and therefore what about the nature of thing we want to know would determine how we know it, he instead *first* sought to determine what is real based on what we *can* know, albeit immediately and independently as per the

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<sup>1</sup> Brian McLaren: *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Oden, *After Modernity, What?*

unencumbered, unbiased self—unencumbered that is from a-prior religious assumptions or religious tradition especially.

Liberal-Individualism: real = self

Peter Berger's, *The Homeless Mind*:

"the conception of the naked self, beyond institutions and roles as the *ens realissimum* [the most real] of human being is at the very heart of modernity."<sup>3</sup>

Thomas Oden, *After Modernity, What?*

*The rhetoric of unrestrained, individual freedom is a prominent earmark of the spirit of modernity. The goal of modern life is to be liberated from restrictions, constraints, traditions, and all social parenting, all of which are self-evidently presumed to be dehumanizing... the social, psychological and political strategies and rhetoric of modernity all focus on a highly abstract notion of individual freedom... sustained covenant accountability is misplaced in the interest of subjective self-expression."*<sup>4</sup>

What would "authentic" conversion look like?

Robert Bellah's 1970's study entitled *Habits of the Heart, Individualism and Commitment in American Life* wherein the modernist "reversal" of pre-modern sociology was nicely summed up as follows.

*For Americans, the traditional relationship between the individual and the religious community is to some degree reversed. On the basis of our interviews, we are not surprised to learn that a 1978 Gallup poll found that 80 percent of Americans agreed that 'an individual should arrive at his or her own religious beliefs independent of any church or synagogue.' From the traditional point of view, this is a strange statement — it is precisely within the church or synagogue that one comes to one's religious beliefs — but to many Americans it is the Gallup finding that is normal.*<sup>5</sup>

What would "orthodoxy" look like?

What about Christ is missing?

Modern-Rationalism:

Modernity was from its very beginning, a *rationalist* and/or *positivist* program in epistemology as predicated upon the a-priori supposition that "real" is what can be *founded* upon an irrefutable rationalist and/or empiricist *foundation* respectively.

How is the notion of "fact" changed?

Fueled by the Cartesian premise of epistemic *foundationalism*, "metaphysics," according to Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, was limited to the "bounds of experience" as to redefine the limits of "pure reason." As noted by Carl Henry, "modern theology shared one decisive and controlling premise, that man does not and cannot have *cognitive* knowledge of God."<sup>6</sup> Kant waxed poetic about the whole thing:

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Berger, *The Homeless Mind*, 213

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Oden, *Beyond Modernity... What?* p.47

<sup>5</sup> Gallop Poll taken in 1978 and quoted in Robert Bellah, *Habits of the Heart, Individualism and Commitment in American Life*.

<sup>6</sup> Carl Henry, *Brink*, p. 10.

*This domain (within the bounds of experience) is an island, enclosed by nature itself within unalterable limits. It is the land of truth—enchanted name!—surrounded by a wide and stormy ocean, the native home of illusion, where many a fog bank and many a swiftly melting iceberg give the deceptive appearance of farther shores, deluding the adventurous seafarer ever anew with empty hopes, and engaging him in enterprises which he can never abandon and yet is unable to carry to completion.*<sup>7</sup>

Is he right? “Pure” Reason?

Key: the Cartesian premise limits pure knowledge to what can be defined inductively (vs. deductive) as starting with self... then “pure reason” has no transcendent source.

It was a “world without windows” according to Peter Berger, a world that could no longer get “beyond the ordinary” to an “infinitely vaster and ‘more real’ world, in which and through which human life receives its ultimate significance.”

- E.g. If the program was to place epistemic confidence in *nothing but* the rational and/or empirical “island of truth” as foundational to pure reason, the prevailing praxis was therefore to present *all* “true” knowledge as *limited* to the kind of knowledge that could be verified upon the *foundationalist* premise of an irrefutable syllogism (*rationalism*) and/or verifiable observation per the scientific method (*positivism*).

#### Modern Subjectivism in Ironic Reaction to Pure Reason:

In the private oriented direction, in the attempt at preserving the “beyond ordinary” and “infinitely vaster” stuff of faith, modern spirituality trended toward a more subjectivist oriented conception of faith as if a parallel universe in relation to the modern rationalist oriented conception of faith.

This parallel universe to rationalism is perfectly aligned with Kant’s own concession to rationalism in his *Critique of Pure Reason* as to presage the anti-intellectualism of modern evangelicalism even. For as “pure reason” per the public program was restricted to the rational/empirical island of enlightenment foundationalism, Kant simultaneously expanded “faith” within the personal or privatized program as to transcend the bounds of reason by a subjectivist turn. In Kant’s own words, “I have therefore found it necessary to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith.”<sup>8</sup>

Kant’s pragmatism represents the subjectivist turn in enlightenment epistemology no less than was espoused by Fredrick Schleiermacher’s feeling oriented subjectivity and Albrecht Ritschl’s reaction to Schleiermacher in the form of a more pragmatic oriented subjectivity perhaps more aligned with Kant. But to be clear, faith as it were was necessarily privatized if not then marginalized into the private realm of “if it works” kind of serendipitous status within the populist sphere of modern democratization especially.

Summary: at the risk of oversimplification, while modern spirituality trended toward a rationalist program, it also trended toward a subjectivist pragmatism, albeit oriented toward individualistic pragmatism. How then did all this play out in American spirituality, and especially evangelical spirituality per its relevance to emergent spirituality *after* modernity?

#### Modern Evangelical Spirituality:

- Some like theologian Richard Lints in his *Fabric of Theology, A Prolegomena to Evangelical Theology* documents it back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century “Second Great Awakening and the Evangelical Empires.”
- Others like historian Nathan Hatch will want to identify American evangelicalism back even to the 18<sup>th</sup> century revolutionary impetus in his *The Democratization of American Christianity*.

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<sup>7</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan and Co., 1929), p. 326-327.

<sup>8</sup> *Critique*, BXXX

- Others still, like historian Harry Stout, will want to trace it all the way back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century First Great Awakening per his *The Divine Dramatist, George Whitfield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism*.

All three camps in general agreement that evangelicalism was most essentially a

- Populist moment oriented to the “sovereign audience” (e.g. liberal-individualism)
- Committed to the enlightenment orientation—both in its modern rationalist orientation and in its subjectivist orientation, simultaneously. (Modern rationalism, positivism, subjectivism)
  - Sociologist James Hunter,
 

“evangelical orientation toward the Bible” was a “trend at one level that involves an accommodation of varying degrees to modern epistemology—philosophical rationalism, even shades of positivism” on the one hand and yet simultaneously “de-objectified wherein in different terms, there is a shift from a concern with “what the Bible states” to a more subjectivist “what God is telling me.”<sup>9</sup> (exactly parallel to philosophical modernism).

#### E.g. Subjectivism:

- Richard Hofstadter in *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*

“the evangelical movement has been the most powerful carrier of this kind of religious anti-intellectualism and its antinomian impulse.”<sup>10</sup>
- Note C. Stephen Evans critique of modern subjectivism in his *Subjectivity and Religious Belief* (1978).

#### E.g. Rationalism

On the philosophical side of modernity, the culprit acid of secularization was of course an anti-supernatural driven epistemology as applied to religious faith. It was the world of A.J. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936) where it was argued that God talk was nonsense since it was based on neither logic nor empirical evidence.

Theological evangelicals, no less than theological liberals, enlisted the “nothing buttery” program of epistemic rationalism. Christian apologetics was reduced to syllogistic proofs and scientific evidences; all distilled into campus debates and Christian worldview conferences across America.

- R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner and Arthur Lindsey, *A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith* by.
- Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands A Verdict*
- *Etc.*

*Note:* Nicholas Wolterstorff's observation that all of this represented a migration of theistic argument that had once been devised under the enlightenment generated natural theology.<sup>11</sup> He for instance credits John Locke and David Hume even Bertrand Russell for the evidentialist turn within the enlightenment praxis.

#### *Modernist “nothing-buttery” reductionism illustrated in evangelical practice:*

The evangelical reaction to Hegels', Darwins', Marx's, Nietzsche's and Spener's anti-supernaturalist oriented historicism was to compile their *own* reductionist creed in the five *fundamentals* at the Bible Conference at Niagara in 1895. And again, notice very carefully the selection of “fundamentals” and what was left out if compared to any ancient creed:

<sup>9</sup> James Hunter, *The Coming Generation*, p. 46-47

<sup>10</sup> Richard Hofstadler, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, (1962) p. 57.

<sup>11</sup> *Rationality, Religious Belief and Moral Commitments*, p. 38-81.

- Plenary inspiration of inerrant scriptures (literalism)
- The Virgin Birth
- The Substitutionary Atonement
- Bodily resurrection
- Second and bodily return of Christ

Clearly, the late 19th century foundationalist premise that was oriented to historicism was as much determinative of the “fundamentalists” as any attempt at representing even the “fundamental” tenants of Christian orthodoxy classically understood. For if compared to the pre-modern patristic articles of faith, where are the classic doctrines of Holy Trinity, Christology, and the Church for instance? Or if even compared to the early modern era of the 16<sup>th</sup> century reformation context, where is the *ordo salutis* doctrines related to Divine election, effectual calling-regeneration, repentance and faith, justification, sanctification, perseverance, glorification? Clearly, modernity set the agenda for anti-modern fundamentalism as much as modern liberalism—they were both committed to foundationalism if not also reductionist vis-à-vis anepistemic confidence in Christian faith and practice.

So called “lowest common denominator” spirituality emerged! (Right out of Descarte!) Evangelicalism had been “had.”

#### Dissenting Voices:

- Wolterstorf joined with Alvin Plantinga in their co-edited *Faith and Rationality* in believing that evidentialism was both too restrictive and incoherent.
- Cornelius Van Til in his *The Defense of The Faith* (1955) and later popularized by practitioners like Francis Schaeffer, especially his *The God Who Is There* (1968)

Note: Both espoused a more communal apologetic (Post-Liberal Communalism and Shaeffer’s “L’Abri”) that will anticipate the so-called “post-modern” reaction to modernity.

- The evangelical magisterium of a democratized “sovereign audience.”

In America the principal mediator of God’s voice has not been state, church, council, confession, ethnic group, university college or seminary; it has been quite simply, the people... the impulse to rework Christianity into forms that were unmistakably popular... and democratic in at least three respects: it was audience centered, intellectually open to all, and organizationally pluralistic and innovative. Nathan Hatch

About Tocquevilles’ discovery in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Nathan Hatch wraps it up nicely, “expecting to find priests, he found politicians.”

- Mark Noll: “evangelical interpretation assigned first place to popular approval.

#### Modern Evangelical Praxis:

- One on one evangelism (vs. corporate evangelism)
- *Personal* conversion that was all the more authentic if occurring *outside* of the organized church.
- extravagant “bar room” style and immediate kinds of conversion stories over the more conventional (to pre-modern era) kinds of gradual conversion stories with respect to being raised in a Christian home and church.

#### Summary of Modernity in Christendom Evangelicalism

Robert Weber has suggested that the high point of modern era evangelicalism was 1947-1980 and that the ‘80’s through 2000” represented “the last gasp of evangelicalism in the modern world” (*Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*). He further notes that during this time, Christian spirituality became

“increasingly pragmatic, corporate, entertainment oriented and need driven as per the therapeutic faith of modernity” wherein “the divide between theology and practice was complete.”<sup>12</sup> And if modernity was at once rational and cognitive, reductionist and fundamentalist, individualistic and subjective; then modern evangelicalism tended to be the same albeit targeting the anti-supernaturalist modern secularism along the way.

But that was *THEN* under the red and black banner the 1966 *Time Magazine* warning against secularism that “God is Dead!” Notwithstanding the significant vestiges of modernity past vis-à-vis works like Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (2006/2008), Sam Harris, *The End of Faith* (2004), Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great* (2007), and of course the remnant evidentialist debaters in response, it all seems increasingly passé!

## II. The Post-Modern Yawn: And A Pendulum swing in opposite direction.

Yet we are again presented with an ominous cover in read on black. This time, it is the April 5, 2009 *Newsweek Magazine*. And it boldly proclaims “*The Decline and Fall of Christian American.*”

*In search of fulfillment left wanting by modernity—post-modern was at once anti-modern in praxis if not more modern in philosophy.*

### Critiques of Modernity:

- Joey Horstman’s “*post-modern yawn!*”
- Donald MacKay *nothing butteryism*.

E.g. For if the program was to explain a thing within the bounds of “pure reason” and empirical based fact, much in life-- love, mystery, romance, bravery, sin, and of course faith-- was being explained away! The very notion of “fact” excluded revelation and much of what we know as fulfilling. Without doubt, the *nothing-buttery* reductionism of modernity, and especially the way it tended to truncate life and spirituality into contrived, bite-sized “fundamentals” was producing a culture wide dissatisfaction.

- David Brooks:

*The idea of a spirit world, God, the soul, etc was ridiculous—modern science declared that everything arises from atoms, genes shape temperament, brain chemicals shape behavior, assemblies of neurons create consciousness—free will is an illusion—basically human beings are hard wired to do this or that and religion is an accident, a freak of the evolutionary process... In this materialist view, people perceive God’s existence because their brains have evolved to confabulate belief systems. You put a magnetic helmet around their heads and they will begin to think they are having a spiritual epiphany. If they suffer from temporal lobe epilepsy, they will show signs of hyper-religiosity, an overexcitement of the brain tissue that leads sufferers to believe they are conversing with God.*<sup>13</sup>

### Post-Modern = Modernity Plus

Stanley Grenz: Postmodernism-- “whatever we accept as truth, and even the way we envision truth, are dependent on the community in which we participate... there is no absolute truth, rather truth is relative.”<sup>14</sup> (note again the Cartesian premise now full blown) E.g. if all truth is self- the all truth is relative..

e.g. Richard Rorty’s “Introduction,” to *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (1991)

Richard Lints: Post-modernism “was overtly anti-metaphysical as it very clearly took the “linguistic turn.”

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<sup>12</sup> *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, gen. ed. Robert Webber, contributors, Driscoll, Burke, Kimball, Pagitt, Ward (Grand Rapids, Mich. : Zondervan, 2007)p. 18

<sup>13</sup> DAVID BROOKS, *The Neural Buddhists* Published: May 13, 2008. [www.nytimes.com/2008/05/13/opinion/13brooks.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/13/opinion/13brooks.html)

<sup>14</sup> Grenz, S. J., *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 8.

E.g. The real subject of philosophy and even theology became language in post-modernity, rather than reality itself. Semantics, rather than material things, become the new epistemic “foundation” even as language itself is necessarily *relative* to the vernacular of a given community. Therefore, the fundamental building block of knowledge became the simple word, but words that correlate more to socio-communal narratives than some abstract reality. Metaphysics and “meta-narrative” were “cast into the flames of meaningless discourse...” “since they had no cognitive significance.”<sup>15</sup>

A growing awareness concerning the limitations of foundationalist oriented modernity—e.g. “end of science” and/or “end of reason” expression(s).

Examples:

John Lienhard ( of NPR’s “Engines of our Ingenuity”)

In 2005 describes the “The End of Science” and its subsequent limitations in ways formerly unheard.

“we have many physical laws, but we realize those laws are not absolute truth. They are human constructs meant to make nature predictable. Meanwhile, mathematics has shown us that the only futures we’ll ever predict will be trends, not events. *Our increasing knowledge seems only to be widening our ignorance*” (*italics mine*).

John Horgan’s, *The End of Science: Facing the Limits of Knowledge in the Twilight of The Scientific Age*. ( editor in chief of *Scientific American*) “

“if one believes in science, one must accept the possibility—even the probability—that the great era of scientific discovery is over.”

Chapter One: “The End of Progress” (“Is science a victim of its own success?”)

Chapter Two: The End of Philosophy (Is falsifiability falsifiable?)

Chapter Three: The End of Physics (Will the pointless final theory of Steven Weinberg turn into Hans Bethe’s doomsday calculation?)

Chapter Four: The End of Cosmology (Will cosmology turn into botany?)

Chapter Five: The End of Evolutionary Biology (Alvin Plantinga and the critique of Anti-Directed Evolution vs. Directed Anti-Evolution—Is all this beyond modern science?)

Chapter Seven: The End of Neuroscience (Francis Crick, the Mephistopheles of biology, Roger Penrose and the quasi-quantum mind... and the counterattack of the mysticians?) Etc.

Post-Modern Spirituality: Epistemic materialism joined to Mysticism

David Brooks in his May of 2008 *New York Times* Op-Ed entitled “The Neural Buddhists.”

“in unexpected ways, science and mysticism are joining hands and reinforcing each other” which in turn leads “to new movements that emphasize self-transcendence but put little stock in divine law or revelation.”

“the momentum has shifted away from hard-core materialism to a neurologically compatible spiritualism.”

A New Spirituality (compared to modernity) Emerges:

That is, spirituality is back, even if in ways compatible with materialism. This is especially borne out by the social sciences. For according to the 2008 American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) released in March of 2009, the odds are still at a mere one in sixty-two that you will ever run into an atheist or agnostic on a typical American street! And yet it’s a world where *even* 23% of the 15% who report *no religious affiliation* believe in a higher power, and 21% believe in a personal God!

A parallel survey released in 2006 by Baylor University found that almost 2/3<sup>rd</sup>s (63%) of the Americans who claim *no religious affiliation* still believe in God and another third (36%) said they prayed at least occasionally.

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<sup>15</sup> Richard Lints, “The Postpostivist Choice Tracy or Lindbeck?” *J Am Acad Relig*.1993; LXI: 655-677

And then again there is the 2008 Pew Forum study that reports how 41% of the religiously *unaffiliated* describe religion as either very important or somewhat important in their lives. Again, these trends are related to the *least* religious of us! As Stephen Prothero summarized it, “the nones are by no means non-believers!”<sup>16</sup> But they are non-affiliated or not involved in traditional denominationalism.

#### Post-modern pluralism vis-à-vis the subjectivist/linguistic turn:

David Brooks,

if the challenge for a *modern* evangelicals within a modern secular context was to defend the supernatural of God, the pre-modern amidst a post-propositional context, observes David Brooks, is “to defend the idea of a *personal* God, and explain why specific theologies are true guides for behavior day to day.” In other words, “the real challenge is going to come from people who feel the existence of the sacred, but who think that particular religions are just cultural artifacts built on top of universal human traits. It’s going to come from scientists whose beliefs overlap a bit with Buddhism.”

#### Post-Modern Spiritual Praxis:

Notwithstanding the inherent weakness in over-simplification, Tim Keller in *Our New Global Culture: Ministry in Urban Centers* summarizes the trends as represented in modernity and now post-modernity:

If *moderns* are rational and cognitive; *postmoderns* are more experiential and intuitive. If moderns are secular and anti-spiritual; postmoderns are more open to the spiritual and mystical. If moderns are more hard-line liberal or conservative; postmoderns are less ideologically rigid. If moderns are individualistic; postmoderns are more oriented to community and friendship.

#### Post Christian? Yes and No!

No-- *still* 76% of America confess to being Christian. E.g. there are *still* more Christians in America than Jews in Israel. And of course, just ask a Muslim or a Jew around Christmas time if America isn’t “Christian.” *Born-again* Christians are on the rise and constitute 34% of the American population.

Yes-- in so far as traditional Christian ethics no longer enjoy hegemony in American culture. (e.g. increasingly post-Christendom)

- David Fergusson:

“the emergence of pluralism...in the late-twentieth century have led to the breakdown of any clear Christian consensus under girding the standards, assumptions, and policies of multi-racial and multi-religious societies.”

“We can no longer assume that Christian ethics simply endorses what everyone recognizes to be good for human beings *qua* human being.”<sup>17</sup>

- Darrell Guder: “it is now a truism to speak of North America as a mission field.”<sup>18</sup>

E.g. it could be argued that America IS becoming post-Christian, but only *if* you can add the qualifier, “Christian *as usual*” or perhaps better “*post –denominational/organizational*.”

#### A voluminous and polymorphous “more-spiritual” reaction:

- Within then this flux is the way western spirituality is moving eastward as eastern spirituality is moving westward. Example:
  - *Washington Post* describing a western Yale students’ conversion from Christian Protestantism to Buddhism continuous with his roommates conversion from Buddhism to western evangelical Christian.

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<sup>16</sup> *Post-Christian? Not even close*, by Stephen Prothero, USA Today oped, 2009/04. <http://blogs.usatoday.com/oped/2009/04/post-christian-not-even-close.html>

<sup>17</sup> David Ferguson, *Community, Liberalism and Christian Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.1-2.

<sup>18</sup> Darrell Guder. ed., *The Missional Church*, (Eerdmans, 1998) p. 2



- The *New York Times* “Hip New Churches” that “pray to a different drummer.”  
 “These non-denominational churches are unlike anything before experienced in recent history according to the article—neither “traditional” *nor* “contemporary” the revival is marked by medieval liturgies and practices borrowed from Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox rituals that predate the enlightenment” coupled with progressive techniques and sounds.”<sup>19</sup>
- More spiritual, less “religious” (organized)
  - David Barrett, ( World Christian Encyclopedia), estimates that there are already 112 million *out-of-church Christians* around the world. He expects this number to double by 2025.<sup>20</sup>
  - The Barna Research Group reports that the number of unchurched adults has nearly doubled since 1991.”<sup>21</sup> And at a time when the so-called *twentysomethings* are increasingly “absent from Christian churches,” 80% say that their religious faith is important in their life.<sup>22</sup>

#### Post-Modern Spirituality: (as distinguished from post-liberal)

The “correlationist” impulse: The impulse to directly transform society by means of making a correlation between Christian faith and natural sources for knowledge.

The goal of Christian faith is very much focused on socio-cultural transformation *directly*! Here, one thinks of David Tracy’s *The Analogical Imagination, Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (1981) for instance.

This is largely a continuation, albeit in its post-modern expression, of what is often been associated with mainline liberal traditions. It continues the largely enlightenment vision for Christian based social or public transformation that was associated with H. Richard Niebuhr and his highly influential five part typology *Christ and Culture* (1951), which was an extension of Ernst Troeltsch’s three part typology in his equally influential *The Social Teachings of the Christian Church* (1912).

Examples:

- The mission statement of the Templeton Foundation as derived from its website is “to serve as a philanthropic catalyst for discovery in areas engaging life’s biggest questions... from explorations into the laws of nature and the universe to questions on the nature of love, gratitude, forgiveness, and creativity.” For instance, one example of seeking to build a correlation between science, morality and spirituality is a study entitled “Evolution and Theology of Cooperation: The Emergence of Altruistic Behavior, Forgiveness and Unselfish Love in the Context of Biological, Ethical and Theological Implications.”
- Note also the *Yale Center For Faith And Culture*.

#### Anti-Correlationist Post Liberal Spirituality

Robert Jones summary:

The post-liberal critique of liberalism is that it promotes isolated individual selves endowed with rights but few responsibilities, universal truths independent of particular (communal) narratives, and an almost-blind optimism about progress and the promise of human reason; above all it is a tradition that has lost a distinctive theological voice through cultural accommodation. Post-liberalism resists each of these and

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<sup>19</sup> NYT, February 18, 2004

<sup>20</sup> From “Growing numbers of Christians leaders leaving church” at [www.churchcentral.com](http://www.churchcentral.com), June 10, 2004.

<sup>21</sup> *The Barna Report* May 4, 2004 located at [www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org).

<sup>22</sup> Only 31% of *twentysomethings* attend church in a typical week, compared to 42% of those in their 30’s and 49% of those in their 40’s. See The Barna Research Group of Ventura, California, “Twentysomethings Struggle to Find Their Place in Christian Churches,” *The Barna Report* September 24, 2003. [www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org).

emphasizes community, narrative, skepticism about human reason, and distinctiveness. If the motto of modern liberal Christianity was to "Christianize the social order" through work for social justice, the motto of post-liberal theology is "to let the church be the church" (Hauerwas 1983).<sup>23</sup>

Example: David Ferguson

The emergence of pluralism and secularism in the late-twentieth century have led to the breakdown of any clear Christian consensus under girding the standards, assumptions, and policies of multiracial and multi-religious societies."

The present social predicament "has led to calls for greater Christian authenticity " wherein "we can no longer assume that Christian ethics simply endorses what everyone recognizes to be good for human beings *qua* human being."

Therefore,

The time has therefore come to bear witness to the specific virtues of the Christian life through reference to its setting within the church under the guidance of Holy Scripture and the lordship of Jesus Christ. Christian witness in this social context bears the character not of seeking common ground with those who dwell *extra muros ecclesiae* [outside the walls of the church] but of articulating a vision that is distinctively and sometimes counter to the prevailing culture."<sup>24</sup>

Thus Samuel Huntington's description of "an eruption of a global identity crisis" leading to a "culture of balkanization" as expressed socio-politically in the rise of political radicalism."<sup>25</sup>

Other Examples:

- John Howard Yoder's seminal work, *The Politics of Jesus* (1972)
- Stanley Hauerwas such as *Resident Aliens life in the Christian colony* (1989 as co-authored by William Willimon), *After Christendom? How the Church is to behave if freedom, justice and a Christian nation are bad Ideas*, (1991).
- George Linbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine, Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (1984) and *The Church in a Postliberal Age* (2002),
- Richard Hayes, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament Community*, Cross, New Creation (1996).

## **B. Missional Ecclesiology After The Moderns:**

c.f. Lesslie Newbigin, *Household of God, The Kind of Unity That We Seek, Foolishness to the Greeks, Reunion....*, etc.

c.f. Michael Allen and Scott Swain, *Reformed Catholicity...*

Three factors that started the discussion on missional ecclesiology:

- The Breakdown of Modernist Oriented Christendom
- The Modern Missionary Experience of the Churches in the Lands Outside of the Old Christendom,
- Denominationalism in Flux and the Rise of Modern Ecumenical Movement

Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household Of God*

### **I. The Breakdown of Christendom.**

"By this phrase I mean the dissolution—at first slow, but later more and more rapid—of the synthesis between the Gospel and the culture."

Observations:

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<sup>23</sup> Robert P. Jones The unintended consequences of Dixieland Postliberalism,

<sup>24</sup> David Ferguson, *Community, Liberalism and Christian Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.1-2.

<sup>25</sup> Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations* (1998)

1. Christendom was the background of all the Reformation theologies... This means that in their doctrines of the Church they are defining their position over against one another within the context of the corpus Christianum.
2. A study of the beginnings of the modern missionary movement shows how strongly this movement was still controlled by the old Christendom idea. Missions were conceived of as the extension of the frontiers of Christendom and the conveyance of the blessings of Christian civilization.
3. As extension of Christendom, the line of demarcation was very prominently represented by the high wall of a mission compound. But once outside of Christendom compound, the Church had outgrown the mission compound. Its members were scattered over city and countryside, sharing in a wider and wider variety of occupations with their non-Christian rethinking of these presuppositions. A distinction had to be drawn between the Gospel and western culture, and this in turn meant that the Church, as the body which—in whatever cultural environment—lives by the Gospel alone, had to be distinguished from the society in which it was set.
4. In the meantime, within the old Christendom the same issue was being forced upon the churches by the rise of non-Christian forces, at first more or less accepting the mores of Christendom while challenging its theology, but eventually launching a full-scale attack upon the whole ethical tradition of Western Europe and seeking to replace it by something totally different.

## II. The Experience of the Modern Christian Mission.

### Missionary Perspective on Catholicity:

Everything about such a missionary situation conspires to make Christian disunity an intolerable anomaly. (Household..)

Lesslie Newbigin "Missions In An Ecumenical Perspective," (1962)

*For me, that basis when I am pressed to define it always lies in the actual experience of the missionary encounter, the encounter with the man, for instance, in the streets of an Indian city who challenges, you the foreigner, to say what right you have to bring the name of a foreign God, of a foreign religion into the land of India. One replies to such a challenge by trying to show him how the name of Jesus is not the name of the leader of one religion, is not the name that we in the west give to God but is the name of the One decisive and final revelation of God the man, the One who alone has brought reconciliation between man and God and thereby created the possibility of reconciliation between man and man. But when one replies that way, the answer always comes back: content with the Name of Jesus. You do not believe that the Name of Jesus is the all sufficient Name because all of you have to add something else to that Name before you are satisfied. We have to conclude that what you are bringing to us is not the one Name of which you speak; it is in... a whole series of names – the fragments of western European culture which have been projected into our world by the colonial expansion of the 19th century.<sup>26</sup>*

### Missionary perspective of Christ and Culture:

*In the first place, becoming a Christian in such a situation involves a radical break with the whole of the non-Christian culture. That culture may contain a vast amount of good, but it is determined by the dominant religious idea, and the convert therefore generally feels compelled to make a complete break with it.,,,*

*Later on, when he is securely established within the new community, he can assess the culture which he has left with a discriminating eye, seeking to preserve what is good.*

The Church going out into new territories (from Christendom) has in most cases felt itself bound almost at once to involve itself in all kinds of service to the community—educational, medical, agricultural, industrial. It has felt compelled to try to demonstrate in these ways not merely a new pattern of personal behavior within the pagan culture, but a new pattern of corporate activity extending beyond the strictly religious

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<sup>26</sup> Recounted in J.E. Lesslie Newbigin "Missions In An Ecumenical Perspective," (1962) P. 9.

sphere.. But it may possibly be argued that this is a feature of post-Constantinian missionary work, and does not properly belong to the real business of the Christian mission. .

Within Christendom one is familiar with two contrasted attitudes:

on the one hand there is the attitude, typical of a national Church, which accepts a certain responsibility for the whole life of the community, but fails to make it clear that the Church is a separate community marked off from the world in order to save the world;

on the other hand, and in opposition to this, there is the attitude of the gathered community-the body which is very conscious of being called out from the world, and from a merely nominal Christianity, but which yet can wash its hands completely of any responsibility for those of its members who fail to fulfil its conditions for membership.

A missionary Church in a pagan land can take neither of these attitudes.

On the one hand it must be a distinct body, separate from the pagan world around it.

But, on the other hand, it cannot divest itself of responsibility for those whom it has uprooted from their ancient soil and transplanted into a totally new soil,

### **III. Denominationalism in flux and the rise of the modern ecumenical movement.**

#### **1. A re-evaluation of Denominationalism given its Modernist-Christendom Influence**

Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*;

*It is the common observation of sociologists of religion that denominationalism is the religious aspect of secularization. It is the form that religion takes in a culture controlled by the ideology of the Enlightenment. It is the social form in which the privatization of religion is expressed. As Thomas Luckman says, "Once religion is defined as a private affair the individual may choose from the assortment of ultimate meanings as he sees fit."*

*It follows that neither a denomination separately nor all the denominations linked together in some kind of federal unity or "reconciled diversity" can be the agents of a missionary confrontation with our culture, for the simple reason that they are themselves the outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual surrender to the ideology of our culture...'*

*One of the encouraging features of church life in England today is the growing number of "local ecumenical projects that bring together the denominationally separated churches in one place in order to create a more coherent and credible Christian witness to the whole human community in that place. These are scattered, fragile, and vulnerable enterprises, but they indicate the direction in which the church must go.*

Lesslie Newbigin, *The Unity That We Seek*

*The truth is... that the unity of the Church is something given to it at its inception, and given by its Lord. That unity had its outward form, first in the fact that the first disciples were visibly grouped around one Lord, and then in the close-knit fellowship of the days immediately following Pentecost, in the sharing in a common baptism, a common tradition of teaching, a common Supper, and a common acknowledgment of the leadership of the Apostles.<sup>27</sup>*

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<sup>27</sup> The Nature, p. 5.

## The Flux:

### 1. Non-Denominationalism

I don't create institution—never have, never will... that's an occupation for those who want to play God. So no, I'm not too big on religion," ... and not very found of politics or economics either... they are the man made trinity of errors.<sup>28</sup>

Jesus in *The Shack* by William Young

Many such as Dan Kimball in *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity For New Generations* are in perfect sync with Paul Young's above stated opine when he says, "Nowhere in the New Testament does it say they 'went to church.' I was trying to get the point across that the church is not the building, nor is it the meeting. The church is the people of God who gather together with a sense of mission (Acts 14:27). We can't go to church, because we are the church."<sup>29</sup> This is to see the missional church as more unscripted and less organized rather than as prescribed and regulated by divine institution.

This trend perfectly represents a growing majority of Christian, if not altogether populist sentiment about organized religion? For instance:

- William P Young's *The Shack*
- George Barna's *Revolution*
- Herbert Hoefer's *Churchless Christianity*
- Frank Viola and George Barna, *Pagan Christianity*
- Lenard Sweet, *The gospel according to Starbucks*,
- Brian Sanders, *Life After Church*,
- Jim Palmer, *Divine Nobodies*,
- Sara Cunningham, *Dear Church: Letters from a Disillusioned Generation*
- Julia Dunn, *Quitting Church*
- Jake Olson, *So You Don't Want to Go to Church Anymore*
- David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian*
- Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus But Not the Church*

Church as Non-Essential:

Donald Miller, author of many popular Christian books, including mega-bestseller *Blue Like Jazz* [admitted that he rarely attends church](#).

Evidently, among 360 of America's best-known evangelicals interviewed ranging from athletes, CEOs, Hollywood stars and two U.S. presidents, more than half – 60% — had low levels of commitment to any denominations or local congregation. Some were members in name only; others had actively disengaged from church life." These so called high-achieving evangelicals typically practiced their faith alone or in small groups, far from the public eye.

### 2. Paleo-Denominationalism by Retrieval and/or Return of Ancient *Praxis*

#### a. Return Spirituality in protest to modernist denominationalism:

The new exodus of Protestants, most evangelicals, streaming to Rome" and especially among the so called "Gen X" and "millennial" generations

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<sup>28</sup> William P. Young, *The Shack*, (Newbury Park, CA: Windblown Media, 2007), p. 177-179.

<sup>29</sup> Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity For New Generations* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003), p. 91. C.f. Mark Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformission Rev.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), Doug Pagitt, *Church Re-Imagined: The Spiritual Formation Of People In Communities Of Faith* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, 2003/2005)

To Rome:.

- Brad Wilcox, *A River Runs to It: A New Exodus of Protestants Streams to Rome* (May, 1999)
- Peter Kreeft, Richard John Neuhaus, Deal Hudson, and Scott Hahn, Tom Howard, Steve Wood, Gerry Matatics, the Duchess of Kent, Bishop Graham Leonard,
- Three part series *Surprised by Truth* by Patrick Madrid where converts from Protestant contexts give so called “biblical and historical reasons for becoming Catholic” (Basilica Press).

To Constantinople: A development in recent years has been the interest many evangelicals have shown in Eastern Orthodoxy because of its emphasis on the continuity of the life of the Church, its rich and mystical worship, and its doctrinal stability. A fruit of this interest has been an influx of evangelicals into the Orthodox Church:

- American Peter Gillquist in "Becoming Orthodox" (Conciliar Press, 1990) and "Coming Home" (1992),
- British Michael Harper, "A Faith Fulfilled" (Conciliar Press, 1999).

b. Retrieval Spirituality in protest to modernist denominationalism.

In *Reformed Catholicity*, Michael Allen and Scott Swain document make note of no less than thirteen movements in search of catholicity by means of retrieval in spirituality.<sup>30</sup> The assumption is that the further back in history, the closer one gets to apostolic faith in unity.

- *Nouvelle Theologie*-- *led by a number of Roman Catholic theologians... largely characterized by an attempt to recover the riches of patristic theology for the sake of engaging the modern world more effectively.*
- Karl Barth and the Revival of Dogmatic Theology— *that sought “to turn the scene of academic theology in Germany and Switzerland back to the classical sources of Christian faith and practice.”*
- Reception History of the Bible-- *in focusing upon historical readings of scriptural texts; reception history focuses upon the aftereffects, or reception, of a text rather than the precursors to or background of a text.*
- Donald Bloesch and “Consensual Christianity”-- *meant to connote the basic firmament of Christian faith and practice, derived from Holy Scripture and developed in the course of the church’s witness.*
- Thomas Oden’s “Paleo-Orthodoxy”—*argues that what underlies seemingly divergent denominational traditions stems from the roots of patristic theology, exegesis, and, ultimately, worship.*
- Robert Webber’s Ancient-Future Christianity—*an attempt to rediscover Common roots” and the need for evangelicals to draw from the Christian past, again drawing upon the patristic heritage of the church for the sake of engaging postmodern culture in a profound way.*
- The Modern Hymns Movement-- *This development, spearheaded by groups like Reformed University Fellowship, Indelible Grace, and Keith and Kristyn Getty, has recast traditional hymns from the church’s history into new arrangements that are more modern and very easily sung by a congregation.*
- Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson’s Evangelical Catholicism-- *calling the church into conversation with recent debates to focusing the church on the classical resources of the ecumenical tradition. They launched the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology, began a new journal Pro Ecclesia.*
- Theological Interpretation of Scripture-- *A major focus of this movement is retrieval of pre-modern modes of scriptural reasoning, suggesting that figural and spiritual hermeneutics as well as the creedally disciplined approach of the early church fathers has something to teach us today.*

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<sup>30</sup> Allen, Michael; Swain, Scott R. (2015-01-13). *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation*. Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition. All italic portions of the following descriptions are quotations.

- Radical Orthodoxy—seeks to explain the decline of the church and to provide a counter-narrative by drawing on the heritage of Christian Platonism (which involved readings of Augustine, Aquinas, and others).
- Evangelical Ressourcement—calling for a ressourcement that draws from the ancient and medieval heritage of the church... One example is Hans Booersma, a Reformed theologian teaching at Regent College who calls for an evangelical recovery of what he calls a sacramental ontology from the patristic and medieval era.
- The Emerging or Emergent Church( es)-- an intentional effort to minister to people in a purportedly new postmodern era... with a focus being the retrieval of various practices, texts, and ideas from the Christian past. it is noted how they fell prey to charges of picking and choosing as they wished and (at least in the more emboldened versions) a tendency tended toward revisionism.
- Ressourcement Thomism-- a renewed focus upon the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, reading him within the deeper exegetical and theological streams of patristic theology.

### Summary:

The context is an emerging polymorphous revival in spirituality that is at once “post-modern” and post-liberal, albeit within a global convergence of all things East and West. Together, they perfectly illustrate from whence we have come and where we are going as to introduce what Paul Vitz has described as the “transmodern” context.<sup>31</sup>

By “transmodern” it is meant the amalgam of socio-cultural, philosophical and spiritual trends that seek to move beyond the “yawn” of modern reductionism and beyond as well the nihilistic fragmentation of postmodernism that is already academically passé. The *New York Times* reports how postmodern theory is dead, largely because it did not give anyone the basis for calling oppression and injustice wrong.<sup>32</sup> And as aptly summarized by Tim Keller in his *New Global Culture*, “at a 1997 conference at the University of Chicago the question was posed: If we absorb postmodernism...but do not want to stop in arbitrariness, relativism, or aphoria, what comes after postmodernism?”<sup>33</sup>

About the Chicago conference, Keller continues:

*As a result, there are many efforts—probably too inchoate to be called a movement as yet—seeking to get beyond both the modern idolization of individual consciousness and the postmodern idolization of community.*

### The MA Program:

**And so at the risk of adding to the inchoate chaos of trans-modernism, what would it look like to get beyond both modernity and postmodernity with respect to Christian spirituality and Church practice?**

And how might this at once be “after modernity” and “pre-modern” if even reminiscent of the tran-moderns of 1<sup>st</sup> century canonical Christianity as by divine revelation?

- Brian McLaren’s *A New Kind of Christian*: “modernity was an era of conquest and control; of the machine; of analysis; of secular science; aspiring to absolute objectivity; a critical age; modern nation-state and organization; individualism; Protestantism and institutional religion”(p 16).
- Mark Driscoll, “The emerging church is a growing, loosely connected movement of primarily young pastors who are glad to see the end of modernity and are seeking to function as missionaries who bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to emerging and postmodern cultures. The emerging church welcomes the tension of holding in one closed hand

<sup>31</sup> The information here was taken from Tim Keller’s *Our New Global Culture: Ministry In Urban Centers* and can be located on the “Redeemer City to City” website. C.f. Paul C. Vitz, “The Future of the University: From Postmodern to Transmodern.” In *Rethinking the Future of the University*, eds. David Lyle Jeffrey and Dominic Manganiello. (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1998), p. 113.

<sup>32</sup> Emily Eakin, “The Latest Theory Is That Theory Doesn’t Matter,” *The New York Times* (April 19, 2003).

<sup>33</sup> In The Focusing Institute, [www.focusing.org](http://www.focusing.org/apm.htm#Online%20Papers), <http://www.focusing.org/apm.htm#Online%20Papers> (accessed 4/16/09)

the unchanging truth of evangelical Christian theology (Jude 3) and holding in one open hand the many cultural ways of showing and speaking Christian truth as a missionary to America (1 Cor. 9:19–23).<sup>34</sup>

Question?

Is reactions to modernity a sufficient framework for the discovery of a holistic and healthy spirituality and ecclesiology?

Allen, Michael; Swain, Scott R. Reformed Catholicity

*Many critiques of Protestantism suggest that if one desires a churchly, sacramental, ancient faith, then one must turn from the Reformation toward Rome or the East. And many have taken to those paths, fleeing what they may perceive to be thin theologies of ministry and of the Christian life in the Reformational world. Others celebrate the Reformed church as decidedly un-catholic and seek to minimize any connection to the ancient shape of the Christian faith... But there is another Way!*

*... that the principles of classical Reformed orthodox prolegomena, as well as the principles of classical Reformed ecclesiology, provide a salutary framework within which a Reformed dogmatics of retrieval might be developed.* ‘

*What's right about this?*

*What's missing?*

## **Our Method:**

*First Priority: A Non-Reactionary Methodology Rooted in A Christo-centric interpretation of Redemptive History*

e.g. Trans-modern, Trans-East/West, Trans-either/or dichotomies...

## **I. A Total Christ Method—Christology Applied!**

### **A. A Christ-Centered Holistic (Redemptive-Historical) Hermeneutic of Scripture**

Question: What trajectories are consistent throughout as to inform NC Christology?

About the nature and person of Christ, John in his gospel introduces Christ:

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth—* John 1:14

*E.g. A Christology of two natures—related to redemptive/historical Means of Grace*

- “Covenant Word”
- “Temple Flesh”

R/H Context:

“Starting then with Genesis and ending in Christ’s ascension, we will discern two trajectories that are *distinct and never separate* as being fulfilled in Christ. They are as two mutually dependent orientations.

The dual trajectory through redemptive history is nicely summed up by Meredith Kline for instance as established in the beginning at Eden wherein the holy garden is described as both a “Kingdom Prologue” and a “Glory-Temple” relative to covenant and temple respectively. The one establishes a legal-declarative paradigm for presence even if the other establishes an effectual-participationist power in divine presence. Together, Eden is portrayed as what we are here describing as the “total church” as it where. Here is the way Kline described the “Kingdom sanctuary” for instance:

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<sup>34</sup> Mark Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformation* Rev. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006) 22.



As the overshadowing Glory was present at the beginning of the first creation, so it was again present at epochal beginnings in the history of re-creation in both old and new covenants – at Sinai, at the incarnation, baptism, and transfiguration of the Son of God, and at Pentecost. And because the Spirit's presence in redemptive re-creation is once more both as power and as paradigm, the consummation of redemptive history witnesses the appearing of the eternal cosmic-human temple of God.<sup>35</sup>

e.g. The R/H Trajectories that are Biblically linked to Christ: An Emmaus Road Experience ( Luke 24)

**Luke 24:27** *And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself....* **44** *Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."*

In sum, it will be suggested that a holistic Christology applied to Christ's ascension ministry today involves both a covenantal ("by divine law"- *jure divino*) spirituality and a temple ("by divine participation"-- *participatione divina*) spirituality—distinct if never separate per Christology applied to praxis and therefore mutually interdependent. The two elements in mediated spirituality correspond to the ideal (regulated) and material (effectual) ways we humanly experience the full or "total" Christ in two natures, one person as related to Christ's divine and human presence via his mystic socialization on earth as it is in heaven. The covenantal facing (*jure divino*) will emphasize the declarative and regulative "witness" of Christian spirituality and church practice wherein the temple facing (*participatione divina*) will emphasize the effectual and incarnational presence of Christ really in, with, and through a mediated Christ as visibly the cultural flesh and blood of the church."

Therefore, by means of a redemptive historical survey, the "total church" will be defined by two orientations—covenant and temple.

A. High gospel spirituality consistent with a covenantal orientation in redemptive history.

Thesis: The covenantal orientation or "salvation by divine law" views salvation most essentially as a "legal or forensic" transaction satisfied on our behalf by Christ such as to preserve the grace centeredness of our sacred romance between God and humanity. This in turn will emphasize a declarative praxis in spirituality. The covenant orientation is shown to regulate our romance such as to preserve the gracious nature of our union with Christ by means of the objective basis of redemption that is executed by a covenant forming the basis of our safety and acceptance with God. In other words, without the objectifying grace of covenant, it will be shown how redemption itself cannot be gracious in so far as we are left to our subjective experience and performance as a basis for human flourishing and hope.

*There was never a time in all of Redemption history when salvation was transacted apart from the forensic oriented covenant transaction such as to satisfy God's Divine Law.... "The Logos"*

B. High church spirituality consistent with a temple orientation in redemptive history.

Thesis: The *temple orientation* or "salvation by divine participation" views salvation as a transaction by God's effectual presence that is distinct, but never separated from the culturally incarnate church on earth that is united to the church of heaven. The emphasis is upon a *participationist* praxis in spirituality (four movements of worship, liturgy and sacred rituals, communal one-anothering... all wherein by the Holy Spirit mediate God's saving presence). It will be shown therefore how there was never a time in all of redemptive history (biblically expressed) wherein the benediction of salvation was not by means of divine presence being mediate into culturally accessible encounters on earth in continuity with heaven. This presence, if not immediate, is shown to be mediated as through a covenant-regulated temple wherein it could be said with confidence that "God is in the midst of us" (Ps 90). Here again, the temple orientation is less a legal or forensic and therefore

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<sup>35</sup> Meredith Kline, *Kingdom Prologue, Genesis Foundations For A Covenantal Worldview*. Meredith Kline/Two Age Press, 1989/2000.

objectifying expression of grace and more an effectual or materially present and therefore mediatorial expression of grace. It is to participate in the power of Christ's flesh and blood in mystic union with the flesh and blood of the body of Christ on earth, the visibly organized church of Christ.

*There was never a time in all of redemptive history when salvation was not transacted apart from divine presence as mediated in/with/thorough the temple—The Word fleshed out as to be the Word/logos “templed”*

Three Vocational Offices that are Utilized in Both Covenant and Temple as Fulfilled in Christ

- Prophet
- Priest
- King

### C. Incarnational Christology Applied to Ascension Christology vis-à-vis the Missional Church

**Eph. 1:22** *And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head (Covenant Word) over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Temple Flesh)*

St. Augustine: *The Word was made flesh, and dwelled among us; to that flesh is joined the church, and there is made the total Christ, head and body.* <sup>36</sup>

The Relation of Word to Temple illustrated in Sacramental Nature of the Church

According to the Westminster tradition for instance, it is said that there is, “a spiritual relation . . . between the thing signified and the sign.” That is, more than a mere “witness,” the church by her sacramental nature is a source. According to Calvin, “no extent of space interferes with the boundless energy of the Spirit, which transfuses life into us from the flesh of Christ.”<sup>37</sup> That is, there is a real and life giving, albeit spiritual, relation between the sign and the things signified relative to the sacraments and consequently relative to the meaning of “church” to salvation.

Summary: Thomas Torrance, Royal Priesthood, about the ascension presence of Christ

### C. A Total Christ Thesis:

*Total Christ Devotion:* Total Christ spirituality wants first to remind us that Christ alone is sufficient and the proper object of our faith and love. We should aspire to keep Christ first place in everything, not just sentimentally, but in method and praxis! E.g. his person and work, the focus of the gospel, our method of reading the Bible, the choreography of our ministry and our missional purpose, *everything!*”

*In Christ... we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins... the image of the invisible God ... all things created through him and for him... all the fullness of God... And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning... in order that that in everything he might be preeminent. (Col. 1:13ff)*

#### Result:

A Transmodern Spirituality that seeks to avoid the “either-or’s” of reductionism and pendulum swing reactions that is at once modern/post-modern, east/west, etc.

A Renewed interest in a trans-modern authority and source for deriving our spirituality (vs. paleo-spirituality)

A renewed interest in confessional reading of scripture with the church of every age (vs. individualist hermeneutic)

A distinction between Word based elements of faith and Temple based forms of faith as to make room for trans-cultural unity

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<sup>36</sup> St. Augustine, *On the Epistle of John* 1.2.

<sup>37</sup> John Calvin, *Corpus Reformatorum*, 37: 48.

## Neo-Denominational?

*What I am pleading for is simple, but not, I hope, simplistic. It is simply for a recovery of confidence in the gospel, the truth, sufficiency, finality and universality of that which God has done for the whole human race in Jesus Christ. We cannot accept for him a place merely as one of the world's religious teachers. We are but learners and have to listen not only to our fellow Christians of other cultures, but also to our neighbors of other faiths, who may teach us much that we have not understood. But the crucial question is: Which is the real story? To that question our whole life is our answer. There is no neutrality. The answer has to be given not only in the words of the Church, but in a life which follows the way Christ went, and so - in Paul's words - bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, manifests to the world his risen life, the life which is life indeed.<sup>38</sup>*

LN- The Unity That We Seek

### ○ A reevaluation of denomination

The denominational barriers that seemed so resistant to change when H. Richard Niebuhr wrote his now classic “Social Sources of Denominationalism” now show signs of significant weakening. In increasing numbers, Americans are switching denominations and/or re-imagining denominations as to transcend modern denominational lines of demarcation

#### ○ Not “no-denominational” but “neo-denominational”

- Option 1: Spiritual imperialism—Roman Catholic
- Option 2: Spiritual Reductionism/compromise—WCC
- Option 3: Spiritual Pragmatism—Evangelical (para-church church)
- Option 4: Culture War Spirituality—Robert Wuthnow’s sad conclusion.
- Option 5- Neo-Confessional Denominationalism—wherein accepting that no church/creed is infallible, wanting to be united in beliefs that span the whole counsel of God’s word...distinguishing the confessional ‘elements (global) from the temple forms (Local) , etc.

#### ○ Reunions?

- Rid of confusing socio-cultural ‘Forms’ from confessional “elements”—reunion of reformational churches via use of multi-forms of unity.
- Reevaluation of East vs West (without the polarizing extremes as a result of politicization of theology???)
- Distinguishing the spirituality of the church in cultural engagement from cultural wars... a post socio-political “conservative vs. liberal” to a orthodox conservative and liberal?

### Illustration: East and West?

If the East might benefit from a more ‘high-gospel’ spirituality that derives from legal-covenant theology that leads to substitutionary atonement and salvation by objective grace through faith alone, might the west benefit by a more “high-church” spirituality that derives from a presence-temple theology that leads to a *participational* full experience of Christ as mediated through the covenant defined church.

East-West Union? (notwithstanding other issues vis-à-vis high gospel, the temple spirituality is something we might can share???)

Representative of a reunion of eastern and western Christian spirituality, at least in general terms. Myk Habets, for instance, has noted how Tomas Torrance in *Theological Science* argues:

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<sup>38</sup> J.E. Lesslie Newbigin, *Witnesses to the World* 1987 Christian (U.K.), no. 1 (May/June): 5-8. This is an edited version of a paper originally given at a conference on ‘His Mission, Our Task’, organized by the Parlor Mission and Unity in October 1986.

To know this God, who both condescends to share all that we are and makes us share in all that he is in Jesus Christ, is to be lifted upon his Spirit to share in God's own self-knowing and self-loving until we are enabled to apprehend him in some real measure in himself beyond anything that we are capable of in ourselves. It is to be lifted out of ourselves as it were into God until we know him and love him and enjoy him in his eternal Reality as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in such a way that the Trinity enters into the fundamental fabric of our thinking of him and constitutes the basic grammar of our worship and knowledge of the One God.<sup>39</sup>

Habets then explains, "in the person of Jesus Christ, we see true humanity partaking of true divinity by nature, in such a way that by union, communion and *theosis* with Christ by the Spirit we too, by grace, can participate in the divine nature."<sup>40</sup> Now, by nature here it is not meant substantive nature or essence in the western sense. It is meant communal and effectual nature in the eastern since *theosis* itself seeks to preserve the Chalcedon "distinct but not separate" in all of this. Again, Hybets quotes Eastern orthodox H.K. Yeung's *Being and Knowing* as explaining:

When God became man He was no less God, for He was not diminished by the development of the Godly, but rather "deified" the body and rendered it immortal. 'Deification' did not mean any change of human essence, but that without being less human we are by grace made to participate in divine Sonship.<sup>41</sup>

In other words, and as Ken Wilber from an Eastern Orthodox context explains, "the way to know God is neither through philosophy or through experimental science (what he perceives a western leaning modernity) but through spiritual practice that can open us up to the grace of the Holy Spirit. Only then can we taste the divine, a firsthand knowledge of the Creator." We will of course want to challenge the "nothing-but" assumption in this per the history of east-west partisanship itself. But it further explains something of what we are after in the "temple" orientation as expressed throughout redemptive history, albeit in dialogical relationship to the covenantal. "Theosis" as such is the participation not in the nature or substance of God (a western way of thinking), but in his personal existence or communion. It involves an 'epistemology of presence' contrasted with an epistemology of reason.

Accordingly, John Zizioulas has noted about theosis that it is less "hypostasis of individual existence as a hypostasis of ecclesial (communal) existence." It is accordingly less "constituted by man's biological conception" as it is "constituted by the new birth through baptism into the communion of God as participated in through the church." Notwithstanding perhaps his understanding of the western position, he will apply this in much the same way we will as to emphasize ecclesial "praxis" in terms of its epistemic value (what we would want to emphasize as well albeit in dialogical tension with "proposition" formation and confession.)<sup>42</sup> According to John Zizioulas therefore, the great differences between the history of the eastern and western spirituality is "the west trends toward an ontology of *logos*, or "being in ideology" wherein the east trends toward an ontology of *koinonia* or "being in community." Again, our point is to advocate for their respective reunions, at least in their more moderate expressions if per chance we really are moving into a post-partisan era where *Totus Christus is the Total Church*.

#### The Rediscovery of Church AS Mission As An Essential Element of the Gospel:

*We are to be speaking about the Church, and it is necessary at the outset to say that this means a society of human beings, which—so far as those still living in the flesh are concerned—is a visible community among the other human communities.*

*The question, "What are its boundaries?," is part of the question we have to discuss, but just for that reason it is important to make clear that we are speaking of a society which has discernible boundaries.*

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<sup>39</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 155 quoted in Myke Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance: Not Yet in the Now*, p. 62

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in "Theological Science" p. 63 taken from Yeung, H.K. *Being and Knowing* London Univ. (United Kingdom). 113

<sup>42</sup> John Zizioulas, *Being As Communion, Studies in Personhood and the Church* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press: Crestwood, NY, 1985). P. 49, 55.

*We are not speaking of an abstract noun, or of an invisible platonic idea. This congregation is truly known only to faith, because it is constituted in and by the Holy Spirit. But it is a visible congregation... it is "precisely as visible and temporal as the Christian man."*

*There is an actual, visible, earthly company which is addressed as "the people of God," the "Body of Christ." It is surely a fact of inexhaustible significance that what our Lord left behind Him was not a book, nor a creed, nor a system of thought, nor a rule of life, but a visible community. I think that we Protestants cannot too often reflect on that fact. He committed the entire work of salvation to that community.*

LN- Household...

### **Holistic Union with Christ and Spiritual Flourishing!**

*What is the manner of our ingrafting into Christ? That is the real question with which we have to deal. I think that there are three main answers to these questions and these answers are embodied in great Christian communions which claim to be the Church.*

*The first answer is, briefly, that we are incorporated in Christ by hearing and believing the Gospel.*

*The second is that we are incorporated by sacramental participation in the life of the historically continuous Church.*

*The third is that we are incorporated by receiving and abiding in the Holy Spirit.*