

Ukraine is a European country; yet its spiritual history is quite different from Europe. Europe is Western and a bastion of both Christendom and post modernism, which has brought Christianity to a comatose state in most of Europe.

Ukraine, as a buffer or borderland state, has had many different influences on her spiritual history. Spiritual influences have come from both the East and the West. Since 988, Ukraine has considered herself a Christian country with a strong influence of the Orthodox faith on all of the culture. In fact, the Orthodox faith and Slavic culture are often considered the same. "To be Russian is to be Orthodox and to be Orthodox is to be Russian." The hallmarks of Christendom: the centrality of cathedrals, the institutionalization of leadership with the clergy - lay divide, the institutionalism of grace through the sacraments, the churches central role in all of society and culture, and the attractional nature of the church were all true about the Orthodox church and to a lesser extent the evangelical church in Ukraine throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

However, the oppressive influence of communism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, dramatically interrupted Ukraine's Christendom. The communist purposed to marginalize the faithful as they attempted to replace God with the State. They destroyed cathedrals and houses of prayer, they persecuted, murdered, and harassed believers, they forced much of the church to go underground, and the above ground church was rigorously controlled. These were the factors which shaped the evangelical church as she emerged from the yoke of communism and in the late 1980's and early 1990's. In many ways, the church had been molded to resemble the apostolic and post apostolic church of AD32 - 313. (See Chart A.)

The church under Communism was not dependent on buildings, its spiritual leadership was often bi-vocational and gift based. The marginalized church saw itself as a missionary church with fervency for the gospel, prayer and evangelism in the face of persecution. It was this zeal for the faith and the zeal for the lost, which had us as early visitors, totally enchanted with Slavic believers. We immediately contrasted this life of deep spirituality and humble faith with our own American churches and found ourselves lacking the depth of zeal and spirituality. We were Christendom and we were far short of the apostolic mode of the church. (See Chart A.)

**We were lukewarm and these believers were white hot!**

I can now look back and be totally amazed how quickly mega shifts in culture and history occur.

It has been less than 20 years since the fall of communism. Yet, it seems that the Slavic churches have raced to rejoin their own Christendom and the Christendom of the West. Likewise, the culture is racing to join post modernism.

We, therefore, find ourselves in a place and time where the evangelical church needs to ask, "Where are we going?" Are we joining the comatose state of the European and Western Christian faith or are we wise or strong enough to return to an apostolic/missional faith of the early church. Which traditions do we keep? Which traditions do we discard? Certainly, chasing the Christianity of the West is a dead end street as the West needs a revolution of its own faith and church just for survival.

We would encourage the Slavic church to return to apostolic roots and to be the missional/apostolic church it is meant to be. This has been part of the Slavic evangelical churches history - missional, incarnational, sending, decentralized, and not dependent on buildings.

We believe there needs to be a generation of young leaders who will have an understanding of the times. Do we move to Christendom or do we move to be apostolic/missional? The wide road is easy for a blind man to walk. It is an easy road which leads to spiritual deadness. The narrow road is difficult to walk; it is a lonely and radical walk and requires men and women with great wisdom, courage, and spiritual sight.

It is ironic to think that within the fabric of the days of trouble of the 20<sup>th</sup> century lives the heart and soul of authentic Christianity. Communism actually molded the church to its apostolic roots. Could these new found religious freedoms and improving economic and political prosperity lead us away from authentic Christianity and actually lead us to the sad state of Christendom?

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| <b>Apostolic and Post-</b> | <b>Apostolic Mode</b> | <b>(A.D. 32 to 313)</b> |
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|----------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Advance and Triumph</b> | <b>Of hristendom Mode</b> | <b>(313 to current)</b> |
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| <b>(Emerging) Missional</b> | <b>Mode</b> | <b>(past 10 years)</b> |
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Didn't have dedicated church buildings. Often underground and persecuted.

Buildings become central to the notion, and experience, of church.

Rejects the concern and need for dedicated "church" buildings.

Leadership operating with a fivefold ministry-leadership ethos.

Leadership by an institutionally ordained clergy operating primarily in a pastor-teacher mode.

Leadership embraces a pioneering-innovative mode including a fivefold ministry-leadership methods. No

Grassroots, decentralized movement.

Institutional-hierarchical notion of leadership and structure.

Grassroots, decentralized movements.

Communion celebrated as a sacralized community meal.

Increasing institutionalization of grace through the sacraments.

Redeems, re-sacralizes, and ritualizes new symbols and events, including the meal.

Church is on the margins of society and underground.

Church is perceived as central to society and surrounding culture.

Church is once again on the fringes of society and culture. The church reembraces a missional stance

Missionary, incarnational-sending church.

Attractional / "extractional."

Missional, incarnational-sending church.

In Ukraine, the decade of the 1990's saw one of the greatest spiritual awakenings in all of the history of the church - it was truly a decade of evangelism and church planting. Yet there remains significant questions about how well the church participated in the great work of the Holy Spirit.

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century brings to light questions about the nature of the evangelical church and its future direction.

It appears that the church planting boom of the last decade may have gone bust. Certainly the pace has significantly slowed. The reasons:

- Many churches which planted another church have not duplicated the process.
- Many newly planted churches have not reproduced. Many remain small with little to no growth.
- The vast majority of church planting (70%) has taken place in rural Ukraine where a majority (30%) of people live. The cities of Ukraine remain unevangelized by the church - particularly youth.
- The traditional nature of the church is resulting in the church losing its own youth and not reaching the youth of the cities.

The City of Poltava has 306,000 people with 125,000 people between the ages of 15 - 29. Only 400 of those young people are found in the evangelical churches. That is 3/10 of 1%.

We believe there are three major flaws in the Ukrainian evangelical church which if not altered will spell continued weakness well into the current century. First, the Ukrainian evangelical church has a strong mindset that people are to come to them. There is almost a spiritual fatalism which says, "When God is ready, they will come (to us)." It is attractional. Until this attitude is changed to reflect the incarnational model of Jesus who went to the world to transform the world, the church will not reach its culture.

What is doubling disturbing is that the church which depends on being attractional (come to us) is not attractive to the culture.

When the church does go - it most often goes to speak at people in mass settings without relationships. Evangelism follows the pattern of proclamation followed by decision followed by acceptance and fellowship.

Incarnational evangelism begins with fellowship and acceptance followed by conversation and ministry followed by decision and discipleship.

Second, the Ukrainian evangelical church is dualistic. It separates with a high wall the sacred

from the secular, the holy from the unholy, the saved (in) (us) from the unsaved (out) (them). There is a theology of separation.

The result of this mindset is very similar to the result that comes from being attractional. The Christian life is seen as a life lived out within the four walls of a sacred, holy building, by holy people and their priests. Because we are holy and the world is unholy, we justify a life of separation from the world. This is unlike Christ and is a misunderstanding of Pauline doctrine and life.

Third, the Ukrainian evangelical church is highly hierarchical, bureaucratic, with top-down authoritarian leadership structures which chokes off entrepreneurial, leadership, apostolic leadership, and spontaneous expansion of the church. Authoritative leadership styles dominate church structure. Decentralization and lost of control are feared. Fear of heresy and fear of losing control of the morals of its people are spoken and unspoken motivations for keeping tight authority of its systems and people.

The hope for the evangelical church depends on its willingness and ability to become incarnational versus attractional; to be messianic in its spirituality versus dualistic; and to balance its leadership to give place to apostolic/missional leadership.

These are not insignificant paradigm changes. They are gigantic and transformational changes which will require nothing less than revolutionary thinking and action. I believe that incremental, evolutionary changes to the church in the context of rapidly changing cultures will leave us in the same place tomorrow that we are in today. A tweak of change here or there will not take us to authentic change. Rearranging the deck chairs will not save the ship.

It is my hope that Next Generation Churches will accept the responsibility to break down the barriers to change in the face of opposition and the ever present reluctance to change. That they will be early innovators for the sake of the gospel. That they will have a healthy dissatisfaction with traditions and styles that no longer work to reach emerging generations, that their mantra will be - INCARNATION, MESSIANIC SPIRITUALITY, APOSTOLIC/MISSIONAL.

## **THE INCARNATIONAL CHURCH**

Our model for the incarnational church is Jesus Christ who being God came to us to live in this world. God became fully human in Jesus Christ.

The hallmarks of this incarnation:

**IDENTIFICATION** - Jesus identified with us when He became fully human fully expressing His love for us His willingness to understand us. (Phil. 2:6-8; Heb. 5:7, 8)

**LOCALITY** - Jesus came to a specific place, to a specific people, in a specific time (John 1:14). He dwelt with real people in real places in real life circumstances.

**CHRIST-LIKENESS** - God of eternity is expressed and manifested in the life of Jesus Christ on earth. Jesus is the center for all knowing, loving, and following of God.

These hallmarks must be our guide if we are to be incarnational following Christ as our model. We must ask ourselves and honestly answer and evaluate our responses:

How are we identifying with our culture?

How do we dwell with our culture? Do we have a real and abiding presence in our communities?

What is our primary motivation - do we primarily send or do we primarily extract people from their communities and family groups?

If we accept the premise that Jesus was both missional and incarnated and we should follow His example; then we each must take a critical, self-examining look at our work. Are we fundamentally attractional or incarnated?

Do most of our activities simply involve inviting people to church related meetings?

Is our evangelism primarily about mobilizing church members to attract unbelievers into church where they can experience God? Are we doing genuine "outreach" or is it more like "drag them in"?

Do we encourage new believers to maintain their relationships and to be missionaries or do we encourage them to leave all relationships and spend their time with us?

Do we spend more time developing religious programs or developing relationships?

What are God's people doing where they live, work, and have their heart - passion?

Who are we touching? People like us? Many diverse people?

Perhaps the most important question is how can we both attractional and incarnation? Can we? Should we?

### **Wells and Fences: An Illustration**

It is important here to distinguish between centered sets and bounded sets, for this goes to the heart of the difference between the two modes of church we've been discussing. The

attractational church is a bounded set. That is, it is a set of people clearly marked off from those who do not belong to it. Churches thus mark themselves in a variety of ways. Having a church membership roll is an obvious one. This mechanism determines who's in and who's out. The missional-incarnational church, though is a centered set. This means that rather than drawing a border to determine who belongs and who doesn't, a centered set is defined by its core values, and people are not seen as in or out, but as closer or further away from the center. IN that sense, everyone is in and no one is out. Though some people are close to the center and others far from it, everyone is potentially part of the community in its broadest sense.

A useful illustration is to think of the difference between wells and fences. In some farming communities, the farmers might build fences around their properties to keep their livestock in and the livestock of neighboring farms out. This is a bounded set. But in rural communities where farms or ranches cover an enormous geographic area, fencing the property is out of the question. In our home of Australia, ranches (called stations) are so vast that fences are superfluous. Under these conditions a farm has to sink a bore and create a well, a precious water supply in the Outback. It is assumed that livestock, though they will stray, will never roam too far from the well, lest they die. This is a centered set. As long as there is a supply of clean water, the livestock will remain close by.

Churches that see themselves as a centered set recognize that the gospel is so precious, so refreshing that, like a well in the Australian Outback, lovers of Christ will not stray too far from it. It is then a truly Christ-centered model. Rather than seeing people as Christian or non-Christian as in or out, we would see people by their degree of distance from the center, Christ. IN this way, the missional-incarnational church sees people as Christian and not-yet-Christian. It acknowledges the contribution of not-yet-Christians to Christian community and values the contribution of all people. Jesus' faith community was clearly a centered set, with him at the center. There's evidence that some disciples drew closer to the center than others (Peter, James, and John) and that at least one disciple drew away from the center. The gospels speak of the women who traveled with them. Acts make reference to numerous faith communities. It seems that the community of Christ was not as simple as thirteen guys roaming the countryside. There was a rich intersection of relationships with some nearer the center and others further away, but all invited to join in the kingdom-building enterprise. If the modern church followed this biblical model, the church would be more concerned with relationships than with numbers.

If we return to the metaphor of the net, we might see a group of very committed Christian people befriending a number of not-yet-Christians in a variety of settings. Some will know each other, others will not, but the network of friendships will intersect at a variety of levels and degrees. Some of these not-yet-Christians will be close to identifying themselves as Christian, and others will not want to at all. But it's in the commitment to strengthening these bonds that the missional-incarnational mode functions best. As we've seen, some emerging incarnational

churches are operating as dance venues, bookshops, or café' the regular clientele can include those closer to the center and others far from it, but with an incarnational community eating and drinking regularly at the café' there is a greater chance of that net of relationships sweeping more into the sea5rch for God.

For us the center should be Jesus himself. The gospel is the central imperative for Christian mission. Since at the core of a centered set is Christ, a church should be concerned with fostering increasing closeness to Jesus in the lives of all those involved. We believe that a centered-set church must have a very clear set of beliefs, rooted in Christ and his teaching. This belief system must be nonnegotiable and strongly held to by the community closest to its center. A centered-set church is not concerned with artificial boundaries that bounded-set churches have traditionally added. In bounded-set churches all sorts of criteria are determined for the acceptance or rejection of prospective members (smoking, drinking alcohol, living together outside marriage, differing views on Christ's return). In a centered-set church it is recognized that we are all sinners, all struggling to be the best people we can be. But we also believe that the closer one gets to the center (Christ), the more Christlike one's behavior should become. Therefore core members of the church will exhibit the features of Christ's radical lifestyle (love, generosity, healing, hospitality, forgiveness, mercy, peace and more), and those two have just begun the journey toward Christ (and whose lives may not exhibit such traits) are still seen as "belonging". No one is considered unworthy of belonging because they happen to be addicted to tobacco, or because they're not married to their live-in partner. Belonging is a key value. The growth toward the center of the set is the same as the process of discipleship.

Let's face it, there are many paid-up members of respectable churches who might no "live in sin," but whose lives are marked by greed or gluttony. The bounded-set church has determined a socially acceptable standard by which to exclude certain peoples. The centered-set church will see everyone as equally fallen. It will accept all people but will make Christlikeness a key community goal. Becoming more Christlike is more likely to happen in community than in isolation. As our relationships with not-yet-Christians strengthen, and they meet others in our community, they soon discover our values. They may not embrace our calling to Christlikeness, but they will see it as central. Will the missional church at times have members whose lives don't reflect the lifestyle of Jesus? Of course. So does the traditional church. But in the traditional church it's easier to hide our foibles and fallenness. In the missional church, where relationship is the conduit for mission, things will be different. We, in fact, believe that discipleship could well be more rigorous in the missional church than in the traditional church, because transparency and proximity are key values.

A bounded-set church and a centered set church also think in fundamentally different ways about evangelism. Evangelism in the bounded set is focused heavily on getting people into the religious zone. As we've already pointed out, this is represented by the unyielding allegiance to

the work of getting people to come to church. We stress again that we don't object to inviting people to worship meetings. Even in the missional (centered-set) church, there should be the opportunity to invite not-yet-Christians to experience Christian community and worship. But in the incarnational mode the emphasis is well and truly on a cross-cultural Go-To-Them mentality.

It assumes that in every human being there is a longing to know the reason for their existence, the purpose of their lives. Leo Tolstoy once despaired, "The question was: Why should I live? Or: Is there anything real or imperishable that will come from my illusory and perishable life? Or: What kind of meaning can my finite existence have in this infinite universe?" Some people, like Tolstoy, embark upon a search with energy derived from honest despair. Some refuse to each and love themselves in any number of diversions - from material possessions to personal achievement to collecting new experiences. But still some others have simply not woken up to the realization that there is a search to be made. As a centered set, the missional-incarnational church sees that its role is not just to "present" Christ in one fell swoop, but to tantalize not-yet-Christians into beginning the search. As long ago as the 1970s Vincent Donovan was advocating such an approach: "In working with young people in America, do not try to call them back to where they were, and do not try to call them to where you are, as beautiful as that place might seem to you. You must have the courage to go with them to a place that neither you nor they have ever been before. "The idea that Christians can learn about God, life, faith, truth, honesty, and so forth from unbelievers is never given credence in a bounded set. It takes the openness of the centered set to do this effectively. The following table is a useful summary of the differences between the two approaches:

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| <b>Bounded-Set Approach</b> |
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| <b>Centered-Set Approach</b> |
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| The evangelizer is the expert who has special knowledge regarding God that the lost person must take i |
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| Each person is the expert on his or her own life and has the God-given ability to seek for the truth. The |
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The "lost" person is viewed as flawed in character and sinful.

Each person is viewed as created in the image of God-precious, valuable and loved by God.

Seeing people as simply lost or saved, it tries to paternally "fix up" sinners and make them like us.

Seeing people as seekers, it tries to stimulate others to ask, seek and knock, while understanding we do

The goal is to get them to sign on, to profess belief, to become part of our team.

The goal is for the process of discovery of Christ and the search for truth to be furthered in the person.

A cataclysmic change occurs in people called "conversion".

Conversion is a process that does not begin and end with the profession of faith in Christ but begins with

We Christians know and have the whole truth.

We don't know everything about life or God - humility and wonder remain.

For the centered-set approach to work in the church, it must be grounded in an incarnational

mode. If we persist with the attractional approach and then try to think of our church as a centered set, we won't reach anybody. If you must stick with the traditional-attractional mode, then you are obligated to see your church as a bounded set. In that case, evangelism and outreach will consist of telling others that it's better inside the set than out and trying to get them over the line, into the church. Only when a community of faith is prepared to leave its space and enter into another subculture will it be able to effectively see itself, as and be, a centered set.

Perhaps an example will help here. Adam and Amy (real people, true story) are a young Christian couple. For Adam's birthday, Amy gave him a voucher for a parachute jump from a light plane (why, we don't know!) In order for Adam to take the jump, they had to drive into the country a couple of hours away from their home. As they were making the early Saturday morning trip, they noticed dark storm clouds building on the horizon, and by the time they pulled into the airstrip, a fierce thunderstorm had hit. They were ushered into the hanger by the skydiving instructor, who told them they could not go up in that weather. However, the instructor reported that the forecast was for the downpour to blow over by lunchtime. If they liked they could have breakfast in the hangar with various members of the skydiving club and wait out the storm. Adam and Amy took him up on his offer.

As they tell it, Adam and Amy ate a hearty meal with a collection of pilots, skydivers, base-jumpers, wives, girlfriends, babies, and toddlers. As the morning wore on, more and more people came to the isolated hangar in the middle of a field in the country. Adam said he and Amy were welcomed into this community with open arms. Some people worked on airplane engines, while others repaired and maintained various types of equipment. There was much laughter and a real sense of family as the rain thundered down on the hangar's tin roof. On more than one occasion Adam was told that he and Amy would be welcome to join them every Saturday. In fact, Adam says they were thoroughly "evangelized" by this group of extreme sports enthusiasts.

How would Amy and Adam best reach this subculture, this legitimate community, with the gospel? In the attractional mode, they would set up a church service or similar gathering in a nearby church and hold a "Skydivers Welcome" meeting. They might use skydiving jargon in their advertising. They might invite a Christian skydiver to speak to the meeting. They might even set up their own church-based skydiving club. Can you see any of this being effective? An incarnational mode would take seriously the fact that the local skydiving association is an unreached people group, requiring cross-cultural skills to minister to it. In an incarnational church Adam and Amy and maybe some other Christians would be commissioned to join the skydiving club, to eat breakfast with them every Saturday, to develop a web of friendships, to share their faith, and hopefully activate a search for truth in the existing club members. A church, a community of faith, centered in Christ, would then effectively be planted in that

hangar. The goal would not be to bring a few newly converted skydivers into the church (whereupon they gradually replace all their skydiving friends with churchgoing ones and thus lose their places in the original "tribe"), but to develop an incarnational Christian community within the skydiving fraternity.

Such an incarnational outreach would require all the elements New Testament writers experienced and taught as normative: the leaving of one's comfort zone, sacrifice, hard work, the possibility of persecution, endurance, and putting others first. On the other hand, it's possible for Christians in traditional churches to attend services at no real cost to themselves at all.

## **A Biblical Approach to Incarnational Evangelism**

If the Christian church is to be incarnational and missional, as we believe the New Testament anticipates, and if it's to abandon an us-and-them mentality, it will need to rediscover the biblical mode of impacting the world around it. The traditional-attractional church thinks about evangelism as sending out church members to share their faith with others and to bring them into the church. But the New Testament writers saw it much more organically. While recognizing the gift of the evangelist, the New Testament seems to see the engagement of the church with its world as two-tiered. That is, there is a place for gospel proclamation and the role of the gifted evangelist (though he/she need not necessarily be a pulpit-based preacher), but there is a second tier, the incarnational infiltration of society by all Christians. This infiltration, in order for it to be missional (and not just social), must be marked by the following commitments:

### *Holiness*

Jesus said, "Let your light shine before (everyone) that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven" (Matt 5:16). Built into the very fabric of New Testament teaching on the extension of the kingdom is the assumption that when the Christian community embraces a godly, holy lifestyle, it will so tantalize the wider community that they will seek after God. And yet so much of what typifies the so-called holiness movement in the fundamentalist-evangelical churches has had the opposite effect. When the wonders of life in Christ are boiled down to not drinking alcohol, it's hardly likely to arouse great interest in the community about us. If by holiness we simply mean no drinking, no smoking, and no dancing, we have a very limited view of the concept. In this letter to Titus, Paul encouraged him to teach his congregation to be respectful, self-controlled, kind, loving, and faithful. He told him to

discourage drunkenness, slander, gossip, and disrespect. To Titus himself, he commended integrity, seriousness, and soundness. Why? "So that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive" (Titus 2:1-10).

The missional-incarnational church will make Christian teaching attractive by living it under the very noses of those who have not yet embraced it. What impact can a church that has withdrawn from society have on that society? The traditional-attractational church often quotes, "Come out and be separate," a reversal of Jesus' command to be salt and light in the world. Rather, our lives, which must be marked by commitments to acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God (Micah 6:8), must be lived in close proximity to those we are seeking to reach. It might be all very good to choose to abstain from the consumption of alcohol as an act of devotion to God, but if our lives are marked by greed, self-centeredness, arrogance, and fear, in what way is our light shining forth? To impact a post-Christendom culture, the church must jettison its wealth, side with the poor, speak up for the wronged, and live as a kind, loving community. Moltmann calls this a "new kind of living together" that affirms:

- That no one is alone with his or her problems,
- That no one has to conceal his or her disabilities,
- That there are not some who have the say and others who have nothing to say,
- That neither the old nor the little ones are isolated,
- That one bears the other even when it is unpleasant and there is no agreement, and
- That, finally, the one can also at times leave the other in peace when the other needs it.

### *Prayer*

While living holy lives, the church is also commanded to pray: When it comes to praying for those not-yet-Christians in their nets, the New Testament is clear on what we are to pray for.

First, we are to pray that God would gift the church with more evangelists. We believe there is the spiritual gifting of the office of the evangelist. Interestingly the Bible doesn't speak about the gift of evangelism (as it does with faith, healing, teaching, and so forth), only that there is a gift (to the church) of the evangelist. The evangelists, he or she, is the gift. Suffice to say here that we cannot ignore the biblical role of the evangelist. God has gifted our churches with them, and it is incumbent upon us to pray that God will raise up more. In Matthew 9:36-38, Jesus invites his disciples to pray that God will unleash more harvesters (evangelists, proclaimers). This text is typically only quoted in church by returned overseas missionaries who are trying to recruit more missionaries. And it's quite appropriate for them to do so, but it can also be equally

applied to a local congregation. Each church should ask God to give them more gifts of evangelists.

Next, we are to pray for God's blessing on the evangelists' ministries. You might be quite surprised who God gives your congregation when you pray for more proclaimers, but the injunction on a local congregation is to pray for the success of their ministries. Paul, writing to the church at Ephesus, asked, "Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel" (Eph 6:19). Perhaps you may find it easier to pray for an extraordinarily gifted apostle like Paul, than for the less extraordinary evangelists in your church. But bear in mind that Paul himself was an unusual character in his time too, occasionally in conflict with other Christians, regularly criticized for his lack of preaching ability and his unimpressive presence. Incarnational churches are committed to praying for more evangelists and for their success.

Last, the church is expected to pray for the salvation of their not-yet-Christian friends and neighbors. Paul, writing this time to Timothy, urged him to pray for everyone, including kings and those in authority, that they might come to know that Jesus is the only mediator between God and humankind (I Tim 2:1-6).

### *Socializing*

This is the third primary commitment of a missional-incarnational church's infiltration of society. If the church is living an intriguing new lifestyle that is so marked by goodness that it makes the gospel attractive, then to truly be effective it follows that this lifestyle must be lived in close proximity to not-yet-Christians. Paul took this seriously in his mediation of the Corinthian factions that had split over the issue of eating food offered to idols (I Cor 10:27-11:1). On the one hand the debate about "clean" and "unclean" food was a philosophical-theological issue. It concerned the inherent godliness (or lack thereof) of the material world. But on the other hand, it was a social-missional issue. It concerned the question, "At whose table can I eat?" Paul attempted to address the issue at the theological level (I Cor. 10:25-26), but his chief concern seemed to be the missional perspective. He was primarily concerned that the Corinthian church not cut itself off from not-yet-Christians by refusing their hospitality if their food had been offered to idols. He wrote, "If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience" (I Cor. 10:27). Paul was defending his theological position regarding the liberty of the Christian, but he was also writing like a missionary.

Paul was obviously eager to encourage Christians to engage fully in close interactions with those not yet part of the faith community. In I Corinthians 5:9-10, speaking this time of sexual immorality, he drew the distinction between disciplining a destructively immoral Christian and the church's attitude toward not-yet-believers. "I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people - not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world." Alan's ministry at South Melbourne Restoration Community featured significant contact with the gay community of Melbourne. Following the advice of Paul, the church maintained as good and open a relationship with that community as they could. But there were times when someone claiming to be a Christian began meeting with the church and was openly provocative with those new believers who had left a gay lifestyle to follow Christ. Under those circumstances, the leadership of the church felt it was right and proper to deal with the "immoral brother" (as Paul calls it) while remaining in relationship with many other gay not-yet-Christians.

Robert Banks, in his two volumes on the early church, *Going to Church in the First Century* and *Paul's Idea of Community*, helped to relocate the early church back in the home and around the table, recovering the central place of the love feast. The shared table is a powerful symbol of intimacy, generosity, and acceptance. And yet many churches do not welcome unbelievers to their table and thus perpetuate the us-and-them mentality.

Michael knows of a church in a new housing area of Sydney that was trying to hold two Sunday services each week and getting very little interest in the evening service. The morning worship meeting drew a good number, but at night they usually had 6 to 10 people turning up. Sensing that it was silly to spend their limited reserves this way, they decided to close the evening service. This isn't an unusual story. Many small or new congregations have only a Sunday morning service. But the manner in which they closed the service was unique. They invited the dozen or so people who were attending the service to covenant to use the time they would normally be in church to do something missional instead. Some people committed themselves to serving the local soup kitchen, others volunteered to take calls at a child sponsorship program. One couple decided to spend the hour they normally sat in church on Sunday evening pushing their newborn child in a baby carriage around the streets of their neighborhood. Of course everyone stops young parents in the street to coo at a new baby. As they watered their lawns or washed their cars, people started up conversations with the Christian couple. They told Michael they have made more friendships, shared Jesus more often, and generally been more effective as salt and light in their community since they stopped going to church and started pushing a baby carriage. Many churches close services and their members are free to take a Sunday evening stroll, but by inviting people to see their substitute activity as mission, this church saw a whole raft of new possibilities emerging. Our point is that socializing must be intentional, missional, grace-filled, and generous. It must be seen as part of a broader pattern of infiltrating a community.

From the three broad commitments we've discussed so far, we can see a pattern emerging: The missional-incarnational church should be living, eating, and working closely with its surrounding community, developing strong links between Christians and not-yet-Christians. It would be best to do this in the homes of not-yet-Christian and in their preferred public spaces (the skydiving hangar, the favorite coffee shop, etc.) but also in the homes of Christians. By creating a net of deep, loving friendship, more and more people will be swept into the community, though some will be more closely connected than others (this is the socializing commitment). While these relationships are being built, Christian believers should be demonstrating a holy lifestyle through acts of generosity and kindness, by a preference for the poor and suffering, and by a love for the scorned (this is the holiness commitment). As this complex, even messy set of relationships is being sustained, the incarnated Christian community must be constantly in prayer, praying for the salvation of their friends and that God would raise up and bless more evangelists (this is the prayer commitment).

It would follow that as these nets of friendship and service are strengthening, the ministry of the gifted evangelist comes into play. He or she shouldn't have to be a visiting preacher at a church service, but one of the links in the net. As I am building ever closer bonds between my Christian and not-yet-Christian friends, I should assume that God has gifted our church with an evangelist, one who can naturally and effectively proclaim Jesus in a contextualized and attractive manner. As the net is being repaired and tightened, my not-yet-Christians are bound to come into contact with my evangelist friend. We believe that if our not-yet-Christians are bound to come into contact with my evangelist friend. We believe that if our not-yet-Christian friends were swept into a series of friendships with a number of incarnational Christians, at least one of whom is an evangelist, God will do his work of bringing people into a relationship with him. This leads us to be fourth element of this biblical pattern.

### *Supporting Evangelists*

"Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel" (I Cor 9:13-14). So wrote Paul, though he was quick to point out that he was not after any remuneration, only that the church should financially support the work of evangelists generally. It can be debated that this passage refers specifically to the early office of apostle and is therefore no longer applicable. If it is applied these days, it seems to take a stand for ministerial stipends for professional clergy. But the missional-incarnational church will recognize that the gifted evangelist will be in hot demand for dinner parties, lunches, late-night discussions, and gatherings of parents at the school gate after school. If the evangelists can surf, she should be

at the airstrip every Saturday. If the evangelist is an artist, a classic-car enthusiast, a great cook, or an expert gardener, he or she must be free to interact with other members of the like-minded community. If this means working part time to be free to work the nets created by the church's friendships, then that church should consider supporting the evangelist financially.

Supporting those who proclaim the gospel, when applied to Western culture today, could be a healthy corrective for many people for whom the cycle of work, family, and church is so consuming that they never have time for building friendships with not-yet-Christians. Ironically, full-time clergy in the traditional-attractational churches often find themselves so run off their feet with the busyness of serving on various committees, attending myriad meetings, and running worship services, that they have very few social contacts with unbelievers. We think this is one of the great blights of the institutional church; it covertly withdraws its clergy from casual, social contact with the neighborhood community. The propensity for clergy to move regularly to different parishes means many don't have long-term friendships in any one area. And when a minister joins the local jogging club or the book-reading society at a local bookshop, he or she is often accused, by the congregation of not doing the Lord's work.

### *Jesus-Talk*

While it is the gifted evangelist's primary role to proclaim the gospel, the New Testament exhorts all believers to talk about Jesus. We don't think this should take the form of running someone through a prescribed four-step road to salvation. Rather, it seems that the New Testament writers imagined such Jesus-talk would occur in the everyday conversation between friends. Wrote Peter, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Pet 3:15). As the net of friendships expands, so in casual, ordinary ways should the subject of our hope come up. This might be a conversation that emerges from a film you've seen together, a reflection on a common experience, or at a time of grief, suffering, or even great joy. Peter says this happening in such an everyday way. Paul was no less casual about it when he wrote, "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" (Col 4:5-6). It seems apparent that the two-tiered approach we mentioned earlier is behind Paul's statement here. Paul, in verses 3 and 4, announced that he was an evangelist (proclaimer), and that the Colossians were to pray for his evangelism (v. 4), live godly lives before unbelievers (v. 5), and give gracious answers to unbelievers' inquiries.

If we're living holy lives, praying for not-yet-Christian friends, socializing regularly and building friendships with them, and introducing them to our evangelist friends, we will be creating the

fertile soil for God to do his exclusive work, giving people the gift of faith. This is the incarnational approach to outreach.

In the section of the book entitled, "If I Could Do It All Again" there are three important insights:

### *Listening to Your Patients*

We've come to the conclusion that so much of what we do in church is "inorganic." It so often feels like an artificial experience. The communal life of many congregations doesn't reflect the right complexity of their everyday experiences and beliefs, struggles and triumphs. If we were organic, we would be much more sensitive to the cultural forces, the patterns and structures and energies, of the people we were trying to reach. We would think like missionaries and spend more time listening to, eating with, and playing with the neighborhood we were trying to minister to. We would not assume to develop a model of church/community life until we had recognized and discerned the "natural" ways in which a given group gathers and assembles. In other words, we would see to redeem the organic, existing culture rather than impose an alien model on it. We understand that many church planters these days spend considerable time interacting in a particular neighborhood subculture before launching public church services, but we still find many church planters who, having done substantial "research" into a particular community, then go ahead and plant churches that look basically like every other church in the West, in a classic attractational mode. Instead, why not allow the rhythms and lifestyle patterns of the people we're trying to reach determine the shape our communal life and worship meetings take?

As missionaries, we need to ask, "What is good news to these people (What are the existential issues these people are grappling with before God?)" and "What would the church look like for these people?" The answers will give us clues as to what element of the gospel we need to communicate first. The inventor of the stethoscope was noted as having said, "Listen to your patients. They're telling you how to heal them."

Instead of developing the rich of intersecting friendships we spoke about in the last chapter, the Christendom-mode church is so infected by the spirit of "success" that real connection between people in church is usually quite rare. It then follows that the capacity for such connection with God is diminished. We need to ensure that there is close regular connection between our faith community and the not-yet-Christians we are trying to reach. That will definitely mean living in the same community, but it might also mean working in a local coffee shop, pumping gas in a

local garage, setting up a medical practice in the local area, or coming over "to share a beer with me and see how I clip my roses." Slow it down, listen to your patients. As the poet Lao Tsu says,

Go to the people,

Live with them,

Learn from them,

Love them.

Start with what they know,

Build with what they have,

But with the best leaders, when the work is done, the task

Accomplished,

The people will say,

We have done it ourselves.

A term that missiologists use to describe this strong sense of affinity with a group of people is interpathy. It is not the same as sympathy or empathy. It describes that depth of relationship when an outsider to a particular host community develops a burden in her heart for that community. It refers to the capacity for an outsider to pick up a community's sense of values, what has hurt them and where they're headed as a people group. It's a form of identification so deep that the guest/missionary has almost become one of the host tribe.

### *Multiplication, Not Addition*

In the incarnational mode we would be much more careful of "organized religion." We're increasingly convinced that bigger is not necessarily better. This is actually a modernist assumption. We have come to think smaller is better in the postmodern context as long as it is done with cultural vigor. Bigger means more programs; more programs means more organization and more control, i.e., less freedom! The missional-incarnational church thinks more in terms of multiplication rather than addition. Getting more and more people into the same room at the same time is not part of the incarnational agenda. This might have worked in postwar U.S., where the 1950s American suburban culture was much more monochrome, where the world of the baby boom meant that a one-size-fits-all model of church was more likely to work. Now we are seeing such a dramatic fracturing of Western society into a range of subcultures, even in the suburbs, that one-size-fits all is increasingly outmoded. This is called the subculturization or tribalization of the West. In fact, it could be argued that the mega church in America thrives mostly in monochromatic baby boomer suburbs. Having said that, we recognize it is a great generalization, and we don't seek to explain the success of the mega church phenomenon so simplistically. But we are forecasting what most Western social commentators are saying - that even the suburbs are now splintering into myriad subcultures. Churches, like missionaries, will need to understand subcultural mores and folkways and incarnate themselves into the rhythms of each specific people group or "tribe" to which they feel called.

Whenever one starts advocating smaller, targeted, incarnational communities, someone is sure to raise the charge that they are not evangelistic enough. But we are both strongly evangelistic in our outlook and practice. What we are advocating is an emphasis on multiplying incarnational congregations rather than the current emphasis on filling as many pews as possible. Jonathan Campbell's baton church model has been inspirational to us in this regard. Using the image of a baton, Campbell claims the gospel and the biblical visions of church should be mobile, transferable, and contextual. He says,

God's strategy for building his kingdom is through the growing and multiplication of missionary

communities. Although the context and methods will change, the mission of the church is timeless. The church is to share the good news of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit among all the social groupings and gather those who respond into disciple-making communities. New churches flow naturally out of disciple-making in the community context.

So if a church is growing through disciple making (which assumes and includes evangelism), it will naturally be part of a cycle of growth and commissioning new congregations using persons of peace. Campbell believes this is the organic rhythm of a biblical church, as seen in the Acts of the Apostles (13:1-14:28) and summarized in the following diagram:

An existing church commissions church-planting team.



This team evangelizes strategic peoples.



With new disciples, the team establishes an indigenous church.



The indigenous church, in turn, commissions church-planting team.



This team evangelizes strategic people.



And on the cycle goes.

The missional-incarnational church then sees itself as part of an ongoing process, not as an end in itself. The days when churches would build monolithic church buildings and proudly proclaim that they've been here since 1861 (or whenever) are ending. Now churches will see themselves as strategic parts of an organic rhythm of witness. Some might exist for only a season, others might stay as an entity for generations, but the goal will be to reproduce, not just to sustain, itself. It is a send-gather-disciple-reproduce mode. Thinking about church as a movement, rather than as an institution, will require a complete paradigm shift for current church leaders. But it is a shift long overdue. The church in the West needs to become a missionary movement in its own milieu.

### *Leadership Is Vital*

If we could do church all over again, we would build clear leadership philosophy and vision, recognizing that imaginative, godly, biblical leadership is absolutely vital. It is the strategic area of leverage for change. We would focus on this first and keep focusing on it. It will be important in planting incarnational churches that the leaders select a team only on the basis of a clear, demonstrated commitment to stated philosophy and vision. We have found that some people who can cognitively agree with the philosophy of the incarnational-church mode, still have great difficulty with it in practice. The attractional mode is so pervasive and so entrenched in so many churches that those who have grown up in it sometimes have a kind of default program in their imaginations. They can agree with the need for significant change, but they readily default back to standard practices in reality. It will be essential to take leadership teams through a process of recognizing the difference between what Brian McLaren calls church traditional and the Christian Tradition. Leaders need to understand that church practices or traditions are culturally inherited. They are fully adaptable and flexible for the culture and must not be confused with biblical teaching that is not negotiable and not flexible.

The fourth section of this book deals with the issue of incarnational and apostolic biblical

leadership, so we don't need to preempt what we will say later. However, we will put on the table our belief that the New Testament teaches a fivefold leadership matrix that implies a community of leadership made up of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Eph 4:11-13). We think it is the legacy of the Christendom mode that sees Christian community in terms of a triangular hierarchy, with pastor-teachers at the pinnacle. In a post-Christendom world, the yearning for an egalitarian, gracious community of faith requires that leadership be egalitarian and cooperative as well. We cannot find the term senior pastor in the New Testament, but we can find Paul's desire for the church to be led by all five leadership gifting, acting in concert for a balanced biblical equipping of the saints. The church's current emphasis on pastors and teachers means that the cross-cultural missionary heart of the apostles and prophets is always quenched by the concerns for good teaching and pastoral care. So-called "good teaching" is not occurring in a church that has no heart for its community, since the purpose of teaching is to equip Christians for service.

This is not to say that the church should not be effectively shepherded by godly leaders ("elders" to be precise), but we see Christian leadership operating best as a community within a community. Any suggestion that there should be a distinct class of "priest" in the Christian church is clearly a contradiction of Pauline teaching. And this is not just a criticism to be leveled at the Episcopal churches. The evangelical and Pentecostal churches, with their hierarchies of pastors, are functioning with a priesthood in all but name. The New Testament radically reshapes the language of priesthood, presuming all believers to be priests, able to make their lives sacrifices, and able to gain personal access to the grace of God. There is no distinction in the New Testament between priest and laity, the sacred and the secular, the religious and the everyday. Only when all five functions of leadership are equally balanced do we have a leadership team worthy of Paul's vision in Ephesians. A new congregation should establish a full-fledged leadership matrix from the beginning.

### *Watch Your Use of Buildings*

Michael attended a church once that had a sign out from that proudly announced: "Minister: The whole congregation!" Of course, as we've just mentioned, this is a very biblical way of looking at the church, with every believer involved actively in ministry. But upon entering the church it was apparent that a different message was operational. All the seating faced in one direction toward a high pulpit. The vicar wore a white surplice and a dog collar. During the service, he did about ninety percent of the talking. It might well have been that in the seven-days-a-week life of that congregation every member was involved in ministry, but their public church service sent some very clear signals that day. You can say that there is no distinction between clergy and laity in your church brochure or sign, but the medium is the message. In a later chapter on the medium being message we will address the various unspoken messages we send. But for now, while thinking about the shape of church, we can say that our church buildings and

practices betray our refusal to embrace the radical biblical teaching on Christian community.

We advise church planters to watch for the problem of buildings. It seems most churches that don't have their own sanctuary building are devoted to getting one, but we're not so sure this is always necessary. Church planter Andrew Jones cleverly says, "Any church that cannot get by without buildings, finances and paid experts is not fully being church."

Having a building, some shared money, and some paid staff doesn't preclude you from being an effective church, but if your church would be lost without them, there is a core problem. Where the church is thriving in Asia, Africa, and Latin and South America, many churches are meeting in homes, under trees, beside rivers, in café's, and in public meeting halls. It's in the West, where the institutional church is slowly dying, that there seems to be such a reliance on church buildings. It's