

A STRATEGY FOR PLANTING A SIMPLE CHURCH NETWORK
IN THE WEST MIDLANDS OF ENGLAND

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ABSTRACT

A Strategy for Planting a Simple Church Network in the West Midlands of England

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This paper presents an implementable plan for contributing to a church planting movement in England. It argues that this contribution can be made by planting a network of reproducing simple churches in the West Midlands of England linked to the Fellowship of Churches of Christ in Great Britain and Ireland. It further proposes that a focus on making reproducing disciples formed into simple missional communities can be accomplished in post-modern and post-Christendom English culture.

This church planting challenge is addressed in three major sections. First, it describes the context of the Fellowship as a small network of churches in a post-Christendom environment of cross-denominational institutional decline and increasing indifference to traditional forms of church. It notes the cultural transition from a modern to a post-modern view of the world, a rising interest in spirituality without reference to Church, and new forms of church accompanying a renewed hope in church planting as a missional response to this cultural shift.

The second section considers the biblical and theological basis for planting churches by making disciples who reproduce themselves and live out Kingdom of God values. It reviews relevant, selected experiences in a personal journey leading to experimentation in a simple and reproducible form of church. The section ends by proposing and describing the third place concept as a reproducing missional form of simple church dependent on disciples making disciples who discern and trust God's voice.

The final section outlines a strategy to establish the third place network of fifteen simple churches in three years. After acknowledging tensions in "planning" organic growth, it describes essential practices in listening prayer, Gospel sowing, discipleship, and leadership development giving rise to reproduction of the third place for multiple generations. It concludes by discussing appropriate metrics and means of evaluating, monitoring, and nurturing disciples, leaders and churches contributing to a church planting movement.

Theological Mentor: Kurt Frederickson, PhD.

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To Tam,
who believes in me even at my weakest moments,
my greatest encourager and best friend

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACC	Association of Churches of Christ
BAFC	British American Fellowship Committee
CMF	Christian Missionary Fellowship, International
GBFT	CMF's Great Britain Field Team
CPM	Church Planting Movement
CMM	Church Multiplication Movement
CPTG	Church Planting Task Group of the FCC
DBS	Discovery Bible Study
DHVC	Dickens Heath Village Church
FCC	Fellowship of Churches of Christ in Great Britain and Ireland
FE	Fresh Expressions (of church)
LTG	Life Transformation Group
NCD	Natural Church Development
SOAP	Scripture, Observation, Application, and Prayer
URC	United Reformed Church

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INTRODUCTION

This Final Project represents the most recent stage of progression in my thirty-year personal journey as a follower of Jesus Christ. Determining to be apprenticed to Jesus in October of 1980 was the first of many pivotal decision points that has me today envisioning my role in a church planting / multiplication movement in England. I was very conscious of the choice I was making that day; I remain conscious of the choices I am making today that will enable effective obedience to Jesus' call to make more and better disciples. I want to see in my lifetime these disciples reproducing themselves to a third and fourth generation. Likewise, I am keen to see these disciples being formed into communities of the Kingdom of God that also reproduce to a third and fourth generation.

I did not always dream this way. My first cross-cultural experience came in 1981 as a conversational English teacher in Japan, a minor role in a strategy to start new churches. The experience sowed in me a desire to plant churches cross-culturally. My family's move from the United States to the United Kingdom (UK) in 1994 as Christian Missionary Fellowship, International (CMF) church planters was the culmination of a decade of education, ministry experiences and training. How much of that amalgam actually prepared me for the practical working out of a church planting strategy in a foreign setting could be the subject of some debate. I confess that I did not really know what I was doing when we moved here; it is a feeling that still comes regularly.

In those first few years, we established a local ministry identity, numerous relationships in the community, trust among churchled and unchurched people, and succeeded in establishing a cell group with several people coming to faith. We developed

partnerships with two local churches with a vision to plant into Dickens Heath Village, a new build area close to Shirley, Solihull, on the southeastern side of Birmingham in England's West Midlands. Following that, we were joined by CMF colleagues Aaron and Diane Lincoln in publicly launching Dickens Heath Village Church (DHVC) in autumn 2002 on this new estate. We left our role in that church plant in 2006; our colleagues concluded their part in 2008 leaving the church healthy and self-supporting with an average Sunday attendance at the time of some sixty adults and children.

During a fifteen-month furlough which followed our departure from DHVC, Tammy and I had much time to reflect on our experience in moving to Solihull and then planting the church. While we helped settle our two adult children from their primarily English cultural upbringing into American life, we did so with an eye to the future and a looming question: What will our next church plant look like when we return to England? Four separate threads began to intertwine. First, and early in the planting of DHVC, I started Fuller Theological Seminary's Doctor of Ministry program. The very first class brought a paradigm shift when reading *Natural Church Development*: the fruit of an apple tree is not an apple but an orchard; thus, one should be thinking about planting churches that reproduce rather than one at a time.¹ Second, we asked ourselves about the nature of the faith and discipleship of those first believers in our first cell group. We realized their maturity and faith is of a very mixed quality a few years on from their decisions to follow Christ. We concluded we had to be much more deliberate and intentional at making disciples who when born again "are dropped not into a maternity

¹ Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches* (St. Charles: ChurchSmart Resources, 2006), 68.

ward, but into a war zone."² We needed to think about apprentices to Jesus who begin serving, working and reproducing immediately, living Jesus' passion when he says "I obey my Father, so that everyone in the world might know that I love him" (John 14:31).³

Third, during our time with one of our supporting churches, we joined an intensive discipleship course intended to help build and prepare church-based teams for church planting in closed access countries.⁴ Introduced to the language of church planting movements while participating in an experimental house church, we were challenged to think of church more simply and envision greater impact and multiplication. Finally, because of our extended furlough to be with supporting churches and helping our children settle, we experienced the changes of American culture more profoundly than previous abbreviated furloughs.⁵ Together, we talked about post-modernity in the States and the UK, and we heard and experienced the language of "third places."⁶ As we transitioned to a regime of travel, sharing stories of celebration with supporters, and preparing for our return, these thoughts and experiences began to shape our thinking for planting a network of simple and reproducing churches in the West Midlands called "thethirdplace network."

² Erwin Raphael McManus, *The Barbarian Way: Unleash the Untamed Faith Within* (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2005), 126.

³ Unless noted, all Scripture references are from the Contemporary English Version (CEV).

⁴ Training Ordinary Apprentices to Go (TOAG); see www.toag.net.

⁵ By 2006 we had lived twelve years in England, only a year of which had been spent on furlough in the States. This was far less than a "typical" practice of one year for every four years on the field.

⁶ Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (New York: Marlowe & Co., 1999), 16. One's home is the "first place," one's work the "second place," and "third places" are those informal and public gathering places where a person can experience a sense of community. Hereafter, "thirdplaces" refer to multiple, local expressions of thethirdplace, while "third places" refer to those sociological places Oldenburg describes.

This now exists as an embryonic network with a primary group meeting every Friday evening. An ongoing Discovery Bible Study (DBS) form of thethirdplace meets weekly with a single mum and her children. A family version of thethirdplace called themessyplace has just begun on a monthly basis. A youth version of thethirdplace called thetalkingplace is set to begin shortly. An embryonic leadership team has formed with another couple in Redditch, who started a version of thethirdplace in Redditch earlier this year. Altogether, well over seventy people have participated in the life of the network over the last three years, and around twenty-five would currently call one of the expressions of thethirdplace their church home or church family.

This project provides an opportunity to reflect on our experience of a simple form of church over the last three years (an experimental journey that is far from over), as well as tease out a tentative strategy for the next three years. It will do so in three distinct but inter-related parts. The first part provides the historical and cultural context in which this tentative strategy is embedded. Chapter 1 describes the declining state of the institutional Church in England cross-denominationally. This decline is further traced within the UK historical church tradition of the Fellowship of Churches of Christ, and includes a review of partnerships between the Fellowship and its American cousins. Chapter 2 follows on from this to note the responses to decline and cultural shift in forms of church being planted in the latter thirty years of the twentieth century and the first decade of the current century. The chapter concludes by noting a growing church planting momentum in the UK. Chapter 3 expresses an understanding of the cultural change which has affected British views of traditional and institutional forms of church in England. This shift from modernity to post-modernity will be described as well as differences in the "feel" of post-

modernity between the United States and England. A short discussion on the importance of contextualization concludes this chapter and section.

Part Two proceeds thereafter to provide appropriate biblical and theological reflection on this project. It does so first in Chapter 4 by resourcing the project with biblical undergirding for planting churches by making disciples. This considers the relationship between mission and evangelism, a personal working definition of church, basic characteristics of people apprenticed to Jesus, and church planting / church multiplication movements. Chapter 5 focuses on selected and relevant experiences over seventeen years that have contributed to the experience and current experimentation of a simple form of church, using the "pastoral cycle" as a way of bringing theological reflection to this journey. Chapter 6 proposes the thirdplace concept with references to its sociological origins, then moves on to describe the kind of spiritual community the thirdplace network will be, particularly with reference to purpose, values, and vision.

Part Three of this ministry focus paper concentrates on a tentative strategy for planting the thirdplace network of reproducing churches. Given the historical and contextual issues, and the biblical and theological foundations, this major section focuses on what it will require to implement a goal of an initial embryonic network of fifteen the thirdplace simple churches in three years. Chapter 7 concentrates on goal driven practices in discipleship and disciple-making and reproduction that are organic and sustainable. Chapter 8 then concludes by discussing appropriate metrics and means of evaluating, monitoring, and nurturing disciples, leaders and churches contributing to a church planting movement.

PART ONE

THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

CHAPTER 1

THE DECLINE AND "FALL" OF THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH AND THE RESTORATION MOVEMENT IN BRITAIN¹

In the early 1990s, the Evangelical Alliance published a book presenting societal trends impinging on the mission of the Church. Most of the articles, with one or two exceptions, have little contemporary relevancy. One paragraph does stand out, saying,

Tragically, despite numerous national and local missions in recent years, 90% of the adult British population have not accepted the gift [of salvation through faith in Christ]. Is this because they have consciously rejected Christ? Or is it because they were being offered something they did not realize they needed, in a vocabulary they did not comprehend, by evangelists who seemed indifferent to needs the unbelievers knew they had?²

One might question the statement's missiological assumptions, but it does call to attention the importance of understanding the historical and cultural context in eliminating barriers which hinder the Gospel message being clearly heard and understood.³

¹ This is not to be confused with "restorationism" as applied to some newer churches in England in the late twentieth century. The "Restoration Movement," more commonly known in America, has become a global family of churches dating from the early 1800s, first in America and then the UK.

² Martyn Eden, ed., *Britain on the Brink* (Nottingham: Crossway Books, 1993), 8-9.

³ One flawed assumption was the view that mission by national campaigns with national evangelists as the locus of outreach efforts would bring new Christians flooding into the church. Rob Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism, 1966-2001: A Theological and Sociological Study*, *Studies in Evangelical History and Thought* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), 99ff.

This first major section which follows concentrates on the relevant historical and cultural context in which a simple church network is envisaged in the West Midlands of the United Kingdom (UK). It highlights, to a greater or lesser extent, four major historical and cultural components relevant to this paper. In Chapter 1, first, there is the recent history and context of the institutional Church in England. This will focus on the latter end of the twentieth century and into the current century. Second, there is what is more commonly known from the American context as the Restoration Movement as expressed in three iterations in the UK: one, an incipient and amorphous movement in the early 1800s; two, the Association of Churches of Christ from its inception in 1842; and, three, dating from 1979 as the Fellowship of Churches of Christ (FCC). This chapter concludes by discussing FCC / American partnerships with a focus on church planting. Third, in Chapter 2, several cross-denominational responses to decline seen in forms of church and church planting are reviewed. The fourth historical and cultural component is a review of the cultural shift from modernity to post-modernity, the new post-Christendom reality, and relevant characteristics of English culture; Chapter 3 contains this discussion.

Table 1.1 shows population statistics for the countries which make up the UK. The West Midlands, roughly centered in the middle of England, has an estimated 2008 population of 5.27 million which corresponds to 9 percent of the UK total.⁴ The West Midlands conurbation (Birmingham and surrounding boroughs and towns), has a population numbering approximately 2.3 million, making it the second most populated

⁴ Government Office for the West Midlands, "Regional Profile," <http://www.gos.gov.uk/gowm/OurReg/> (accessed March 6, 2010).

area of the country after London.⁵ Census figures (2001) indicate that 86 percent of the West Midlands population described themselves as White British.⁶ Demographically, 75 percent of all ethnic minorities in the West Midlands are concentrated in Birmingham and the boroughs west and northwest of Birmingham.⁷ Higher populations of Indian, Caribbean, and Asian (mostly Pakistani and Bangladeshi) ethnicities are found in this mix, but others include African and Chinese, and further newcomers from Eastern European countries, Vietnam, Somalia, Yemen, and Iraq (Kurds), to name a few.⁸

Table 1.1 United Kingdom Population Statistics, 2008⁹

	Population(millions)	Percentage of Total UK Population
England	51.446	84
Wales	2.993	5
Scotland	5.169	8
Northern Ireland	1.775	3
Total	61.383	100

Shirley, Solihull, the initial geographical location for the third place, and the simple church network which is envisioned, is located on the southeastern side of this urban

⁵ Wikipedia, "West Midlands Conurbation," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Midlands_conurbation (accessed March 6, 2010).

⁶ Office for National Statistics, "Neighbourhood Statistics," <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadTableView.do?a=7&b=276800&c=Birmingham&d=13&e=13&f=25428&g=373272&i=1001x1003x1004x1005&l=1812&o=280&m=0&r=1&s=1302539781281&enc=1> (accessed April 11, 2011).

⁷ Fifty percent of all ethnic minorities in the West Midlands live in Birmingham; 25 percent are found in Sandwell, Walsall, Dudley, and Wolverhampton (northwest side of Birmingham), as well as Coventry. Business in the Community, "Regional Factsheet: West Midlands," http://www.bitc.org.uk/workplace/diversity_and_inclusion/race/em_in_the_uk.html (accessed April 11, 2011), 4-6.

⁸ Ibid., and West Midlands Police, "Race Equality Scheme 2008-2011," <http://www.west-midlands.police.uk/pdf/help-advice/equality-scheme/RaceEqScheme2008-2011.pdf> (accessed April 11, 2011), 9.

⁹ Office for National Statistics, "Population Estimates: UK Population Grows to 61.4 Million," <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=6> (accessed March 5, 2010).

setting, with forty thousand residents.¹⁰ Overall, Solihull Metropolitan Borough has a notably lower ethnic representation in comparison to the rest of the Birmingham conurbation. As a whole, 2001 census figures indicate less than 2 percent of Solihull's population of 200,000 comes from minority ethnic populations.¹¹ More recently, this has risen to 5.4 percent, and is generally indicative of a small rise across the region of ethnic minorities since the last census.¹²

The State of the Church in England in the Twentieth Century

Callum Brown begins his sociological study entitled *The Death of Christian Britain* with this chilling description of a dramatic collapse of church attachment:

In unprecedented numbers, British people since the 1960s have stopped going to church, have allowed their church membership to lapse, have stopped marrying in church and have neglected to baptize their children. Meanwhile, their children, the two generations who grew to maturity in the last thirty years of the twentieth century, stopped going to Sunday school, stopped entering confirmation or communication classes, and rarely, if ever, stepped inside a church to worship in their entire lives.¹³

Behind these comments, in the literature, an ongoing debate has ensued about the processes involved that have contributed to the decline of church attendance and membership, associated Christian moral values and national identity, and the overall

¹⁰ Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, "Statistics and Census Information," http://www.solihull.gov.uk/democracy/censusinformation_4653.htm (accessed April 18, 2011).

¹¹ Business in the Community, "Regional Factsheet: West Midlands," and Solihull Metropolitan Council, "Statistics and Census Information."

¹² Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, "Solihull's Equality and Diversity Scheme," http://www.solihull.gov.uk/Attachments/Equality_and_Diversity_Scheme.pdf (accessed April 20, 2011).

¹³ Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800-2000*, ed. Hugh McCleod, Christianity and Society in the Modern World (London: Routledge, 2001), 1.

influence of the Church in English society.¹⁴ While there is debate about the relative scale of decline, against the fact of substantial and dramatic decline no one argues.¹⁵

In this first decade of the twenty-first century in the UK, there are three major sources for this information (apart from the other governmental and independent agencies whose surveys and statistics are resourced for reports). First, over the last three decades, Peter Brierley of Christian Research has provided numerous research results based on annual English church census reports,¹⁶ and which have often been cited (for their headline "shock" factor) in national newspapers.¹⁷ The second source has been a major research project conducted by Tearfund in 2006, with a published report in 2007.¹⁸ The third is the British Social Attitudes survey conducted in 2004.¹⁹ It is to be noted that while the governmental survey and Tearfund report are substantially the same, Christian

¹⁴ See, for example, Brown's introduction and arguments in Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 1-15, and Warner's review of the literature in Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism*, 22ff.

¹⁵ This debate is seen primarily in the differing research statistics between Peter Brierley and Tearfund, which is described in the following paragraphs.

¹⁶ For a list of publications, see <http://christian-research.org/> and web links. Relevant to the discussion are Peter Brierley, *Pulling Out of the Nosedive: A Contemporary Picture of Churchgoing - What the 2005 English Church Census Reveals* (London: Christian Research, 2006), and Peter Brierley, *UK Christian Handbook Religious Trends 7*, ed. Peter Brierley (London: Christian Research, 2008).

¹⁷ These headlines came particularly at the beginning of the millennium. A more recent example is Jamie Doward, "Church Attendance to Fall by 90%," *The Observer*, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/dec/21/anglicanism-religion> (accessed March 9, 2010).

¹⁸ Jacinta Ashworth and Ian Farthing, "Churchgoing in the UK: A Research Report from Tearfund on Church Attendance in the UK" (Teddington, UK: Tearfund, 2007), <http://www.tearfund.org/webdocs/Website/News/Final%20churchgoing%20report.pdf> (accessed February 24, 2010), 41.

¹⁹ The Tearfund report highlights relevant aspects of the 2004 British Social Attitudes survey. Because datasets require registration, purchase, and specialized analysis, this paper relies on the Tearfund report for information culled from the 2004 survey. See National Centre for Social Research, "British Social Attitudes Survey, 2004," http://www.esds.ac.uk/doc/5329%5Cmrdoc%5CUKDA%5CUKDA_Study_5329_Information.htm (accessed June 30, 2010).

Research's results tend to be lower by four to five percentage points because of methodological differences in the research.²⁰

Two pictures appear. On the one hand there is the public face of a Christian cultural identity and legacy; on the other is the actual practice which Brown's statement, cited earlier, describes. The two appear at odds with each other.²¹ The public picture that contrasts with actual practice is well stated by this excerpt from Tearfund's introduction to the report (which references its own research and a variety of polls, surveys and UK government census data).

Consider for a moment these well substantiated modern day descriptions of faith in Britain today:

Britain is still a predominantly Christian country. When people are asked what their religion is more than 7 in 10 consider themselves to be Christian although closer questioning will reduce that number as this Tearfund research reveals.

Britain is still a country that believes in God whereas belief in a personal God has declined markedly. More than 2 in 3 (67%) of people in Britain today believe in God while 1 in 4 (26%) believe in a personal God.

Britain remains a country that prays. About 2 in 3 people (66%) pray as individuals, a third (38%) pray every month and a quarter every week. Even among those who never attend church, 41% pray.

And yet week-by-week in modern Britain this personal belief does not play out into any obvious religious practices. We do not see people worshipping in our churches to any significant extent and growing numbers have lost touch with church in any shape or form.²²

²⁰ Ashworth and Farthing, "Churchgoing in the UK," 41. The Tearfund report is more accurate, argues Martin Robinson, because it does not depend on extrapolation of the 50 percent of reporting churches in the annual English census to the 50 percent who did not report. Martin Robinson, interview by author, Birmingham, UK, February 26, 2010.

²¹ Theos, a public theology think tank, has written a series of publications addressing this situation. See, for example, Nick Spencer, *Neither Private nor Privileged: The Role of Christianity in Britain Today* (London: Theos, 2008), and <http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/mainnav/reports.aspx> for this and others.

²² Ashworth and Farthing, "Churchgoing in the UK," 1.

Brown dates the collapse from 1963, though statistics indicate ongoing decline had been underway since the beginning of the century.²³ He comments, "Between the 1840s (when data became available) and the year 2000, the best estimates indicate that the peak year of church adherence per head of population came in 1904 for England and Wales and 1905 for Scotland."²⁴ Another source notes that membership of British Protestant churches peaked in 1900 at 5 million, but slid to 4.5 million by 1970, even as the population grew from 37 million to 53 million during the same period.²⁵

Brown goes on to note that after forty years of decline, a slight rise in the 1950s only masked the coming precipitous decline of the early 1960s.²⁶ He concludes, bluntly,

There is a need for imagining this "endgame" of Christian decline in Britain To declare Christianity dead, do you wait until the proportion of people who pray to a living personal Christian God, who get married in a church or who baptize their children, falls below 50 per cent, 25 per cent, or 10 per cent? Alternatively, do you wait until the last church closes or the last Christian dies?²⁷

If Tearfund's research results are examined further, key relevant additional points can be highlighted in Table 1.2 below. It suggests that a significant population segment, over 60 percent, have no interest in church attendance. Concurrently, 53 percent consider themselves as belonging to the Christian religion, which appears to be at odds with the prior statistic. The report clears the confusion by commenting that "these comparisons

²³ Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁵ Robin Gill, *The Myth of the Empty Church* (London: SPCK, 1993), 5, where he cites Robert Currie, Alan D. Gilbert, and Lee Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles Since 1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), without providing a page reference.

²⁶ Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 7.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

suggest a difference between *nominal* affiliation on a Census form and being truly committed to a particular faith."²⁸

Table 1.2 UK Church Attendance and Experience Segmentation in 2006²⁹

<i>Category</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Population (millions)</i>	<i>Description (UK adults)</i>
Regular Churchgoers	15	7.6	Attend at least once a month.
Fringe Churchgoers	3	1.6	6 times per year
Occasional Churchgoers	7	3.4	1 – 5 times per year
Open De-churched	5	2.3	Used to attend in past and are very or fairly likely to attend
Closed De-churched	28	13.7	Used to attend in the past who are not very or not at all likely to attend
Closed Non-churched	32	15.6	Never been to church apart from weddings, baptisms or funerals and are not very or not at all likely to attend
Open Non-Churched	1	.6	Never been to church apart from weddings, baptisms or funerals and are very or fairly likely to attend
Other Religions	6	3.2	Non-Christian Religions
Unassigned	2		Not been to church in last 12 months and did not answer question on prior attendance

The Tearfund survey further reveals that 10 percent of the population (4.9 million) goes to church weekly (mid-week or Sunday).³⁰ This is comparable to the findings of the British Social Attitudes survey (2004) which found 9.5 percent weekly attendance in the UK, with 8 percent weekly attendance in the West Midlands.³¹ Much more could be

²⁸ Ashworth and Farthing, "Churchgoing in the UK," 4; the emphasis is mine. The contrast is even starker in the 2001 Church Census, where 72 percent identified themselves as Christian.

²⁹ Ibid., 6-7. The figures and subsequent percentages are based on a population of 49 million adults who are 18+, rather than the net population of 61.4 million.

³⁰ Ibid., 13.

³¹ Slightly lower is Christian Research's report that 6.1 percent of English adults attended at least once a week. The Tearfund report explains by saying, "Whereas the English Church Census [of Christian Research] took a snapshot of a particular week from congregations across 50% of all churches in England [and extrapolates for the other 50%], the Tearfund research asks people to state their *typical* frequency of attendance. It is likely that the different methodologies resulted in the variation." Ibid., 14, 35, 41.

expanded upon. However, the primary point to be made is that churches of every kind in England have been in long-term decline. Whether that has been since 1900, the 1950s, or the 1960s in dramatic fashion, the unmitigated decline is substantial and profound.³² Also troubling is the fact those still attending are primarily female and aging.³³

Stated in a different fashion, the cycle of renewal of the Christian faith in the UK has been broken, with far-reaching implications for the Church's mission.³⁴ Significant opportunities to make disciples still exist, and new initiatives and partnerships across the denominational spectrum are being explored. Still, the character of the culture has changed, and missiological eyes will be required to take advantage of these opportunities.

The Restoration Movement in the UK

In America, today's independent "Christian Churches / Churches of Christ" (North American Christian Convention), the churches of Christ (*sic*, also independent, but *a cappella*, with theological restrictions on use of instruments in worship services) and the denomination "Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ)" have roots in what is called the "Restoration Movement." (This is not to be confused with "restorationism" as applied to some of the newer churches in the latter portion of the twentieth century in England.³⁵)

³² "Churches in England have been in long-term decline since the 1950s, with an estimated one million people giving up regular churchgoing in the 1990s alone." Quoted in BBC News, "Minorities Prop Up Church-Going," <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/5349132.stm> (accessed February 17, 2010). The singular exception is the 40 percent growth of non-white ethnic Sunday church attendance between 1998 and 2005; see Peter Brierley, "The Growth of Ethnic Churches in the UK," *Lausanne World Pulse* (June 2006), <http://www.lausanneworldpulse.com/research.php/366/06-2006> (accessed December 6, 2010).

³³ Ashworth and Farthing, "Churchgoing in the UK," 35.

³⁴ Martin Robinson and Dwight Smith, *Invading Secular Space: Strategies for Tomorrow's Church* (London: Monarch, 2003), 21.

³⁵ Chapter 2 discusses "restorationism." See Andrew Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom: The Radical Christianity of the House Church Movement* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988).

Today's contemporary Fellowship of Churches of Christ in Great Britain and Ireland and her forerunners share that legacy, and in the UK these churches have also historically used this designation self-referentially, even if the term originated in the American context.³⁶ All these expressions of church find their roots deep in the early 1800s, developing originally and independently of each other in the USA and the UK, but coalescing around a common plea: the unity of the Church on the basis of a return to the Bible (the New Testament in particular) as the basis for that unity so that the world may believe in Jesus Christ. Worldwide (2003 estimates), this global family of congregations number 7.2 million members and 6.75 million adherents, in over 165 countries.³⁷

The strands of origins are too varied and complex, in both settings, for proper explanation and description here. It is sufficient to say that certain values began to draw like-minded Christians together. These values include such beliefs as a "return to the simple beliefs and ways of New Testament Christians,"³⁸ weekly practice of the Lord's Supper,³⁹ opposition to creeds as extra-biblical formulations,⁴⁰ desire to use Bible rather

³⁶ In its earliest days, "reformation of the 19th century" or "the current reformation" was used by proponents and propagators of the movement. Later in the century a more conservative element began to use the term "Restoration Movement," perceiving in the Bible a pattern or blueprint form of church, worship, and doctrine which must be restored. See Richard Phillips, "Whoever Heard of Such Christians?" *Discipliana* 70, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 14, 18. Current historians prefer "Stone-Campbell Movement" because of the confusion with other groups in history, such as that described here. C. Robert Wetzel, "What About Christian Churches? An Interview with Three Historians," *Christian Standard* (June 12, 2011): 6.

³⁷ Lorraine and Lyndsay Jacobs, "Estimating the Size of Our Global Family," *The World Convention of Churches of Christ*, no. 43 (Fourth Quarter 2003), <http://www.worldconvention.org/wc/worldchristian43.pdf> (accessed March 7, 2010): 2.

³⁸ William Robinson, *What Churches of Christ Stand For: The Origin, Growth, and Message of a Nineteenth Century Religious Movement* (Birmingham, UK: Berean Press, 1929), 22.

³⁹ A. C. Watters, *History of the British Churches of Christ* (Indianapolis: Butler University School of Religion, 1948), 34.

⁴⁰ William Robinson, *The Shattered Cross: The Many Churches and the One Church* (Birmingham, UK: Berean Press, 1945), 84-85.

than sectarian names (e.g., "Christian" or "Church of Christ" rather than "Lutheran" or "Methodist"),⁴¹ believers' baptism in connection with faith, repentance, and confession,⁴² and other matters of church polity and ministry (local church leadership).⁴³

While some "Churches of Christ" are known from 1809-1810,⁴⁴ it was not until the mid-1820s and 1830s in the UK that these congregations began to become aware of one another, and of similar brethren in America, through personal contacts and religious publications.⁴⁵ These UK congregations first gathered for a cooperative meeting in August 1842 in Edinburgh "when nearly 40 messengers from various congregations assembled, to carry into effect the objects proposed in *The Christian Messenger*, for the more complete diffusion of the gospel, and the consolidation of the congregations throughout the country."⁴⁶ A second cooperative meeting held in October 1847 had Alexander Campbell, a key figure of the American movement, as a visitor and speaker.⁴⁷ Table 1.3 shows an abbreviated historical record of this newly formed Association of Churches of Christ (ACC).

⁴¹ Watters, *History of the British Churches of Christ*, 34.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Robinson, *The Shattered Cross*, 89-90.

⁴⁴ Watters, *History of the British Churches of Christ*, 16, 28. This was in Ireland and Scotland.

⁴⁵ David Michael Thompson, *Let Sects and Parties Fall: A Short History of the Association of Churches of Christ in Great Britain and Ireland* (Birmingham, UK: Berean Press, 1980), 17ff.

⁴⁶ Watters, *History of the British Churches of Christ*, 36. Originally found in *The Christian Messenger* (1842): 247; title and full bibliographic details unknown. As a regularly circulated "magazine," the *Christian Messenger* became the primary public communication instrument within the Association.

⁴⁷ Campbell exercised some influence in the UK in that his writings were reprinted and shared amongst Churches of Christ, initially by James Wallis (Nottingham). Campbell was himself influenced by exposure to the reforming ideas of the Glasite Independents and the Haldane brothers during his year at Glasgow University, and prior to emigrating to America in 1809. Leroy Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement: An Anecdotal History of Three Churches* (Joplin: College Press, 1981), 166-72, 349-55.

Table 1.3 Selected Statistics of the Association of Churches of Christ 1842 - 1979⁴⁸

Date	Churches	Members	SS Classes	SS Scholars	Notes
1842	43	1233	Does not include 8 churches in England and 200 members in Wales (number of churches unknown); corrected this would be 50 churches and 1600 members ⁴⁹		
1847	80	2300			
1852	77	2081			
1865	101	3869			
1872	110	4053			Organized Sunday School work begins
1873	107	4115	45	2884	
1875	125	4936			
1885	129	7654			
1887	135	8306	100	9131	
1895	175	10500			
1900	173	11789			
1905	183	13063			
1910	194	14822			
1914	200	15228	173	18749	
1920	206	16011			Overdale College opens in Birmingham
1923	201	16465	167	19417	
1930	184	16596			
1935	176	15327			
1939	176	15229	138	10981	
1940	174	14948			No Annual Conference (war)
1945	156	12101			
1950	138	9811			
1955	129	8761			
1960	119	7821			
1965	114	6823			
1970	98	5148			
1975	80	4028			Overdale closes due to lack of students ⁵⁰
1979	75	3586			
1980					Association of Churches of Christ dissolves ⁵¹

These figures make it possible to track the growth of the movement over many decades and make some observations. First, initial and dramatic growth in the ACC slowed from 150 percent to 50 percent in the two 25-year periods either side of the

⁴⁸ Figures are primarily compiled from Thompson, *Let Sects and Parties Fall*, 202-205, where he includes an appendix detailing annual statistics from the Association of Churches of Christ *Year Books*. Sunday School and scholars figures also come from Thompson, 71-72, and Watters, *History of the British Churches of Christ*, 104, 117-118.

⁴⁹ Thompson, *Let Sects and Parties Fall*, 31.

⁵⁰ Dates for the opening and closure of Overdale College are found in Thompson, *Let Sects and Parties Fall*, 128, 173.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 197.

ACC's jubilee anniversary in 1892.⁵² Second, peak membership came in 1930, a quarter of a century later than most Free Churches.⁵³ In addition, the Association had difficulties in retaining new believers in the local church, and retaining churches within the Association. Papers given at Conference (1886 and 1912) indicated substantial failure to assimilate these newly baptized believers, such that losses of 46 percent (1875-1885) and 58 percent (1901-1911) were recorded in the time frames studied. This hemorrhage actually increased to 97 percent two decades later (1930-1940).⁵⁴

This was partly caused by a widespread aversion by local churches to a "One-Man Ministry" as it was sometimes called, where ordained clergy led the local church. It was the prevailing practice to leave pastoral care and evangelism in the hands of local elders, though increasingly toward the end of the nineteenth century regional evangelists were employed. Still, these were itinerant and temporary, and pastoral care suffered.⁵⁵ The opening of Overdale College in Birmingham was one step to address this, though informal training of evangelists had been in place since the early 1860s.⁵⁶

The Association's inability to retain churches within its own network contributed to decline. During the ACC's period of, albeit, slowing growth, it attracted churches. In 1917, for instance, fifteen of the seventeen churches (totaling 1,341 members) in the

⁵² Thompson, *Let Sects and Parties Fall*, 114.

⁵³ Ibid., 127. "Free Churches" refers to churches or denominations not linked into the state Church and are also known as "non-established," as differentiated from state-sponsored church. Martin Robinson remarks that this delayed peak was also true of other minor Protestant sects, who had a defensive posture against the changing culture, and excelled more at proselytizing from among other Christian denominations than winning new believers. Martin Robinson, interview by author, Birmingham, UK, December 11, 2010.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 114, 128.

⁵⁵ Watters, *History of the British Churches of Christ*, 47-48, 53, 73ff.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 68.

Christian Association were accepted into the ACC.⁵⁷ In contrast, twenty-three churches withdrew from the ACC between 1913 and 1948.⁵⁸ One of these was the Twynholm (London) church, which was arguably the largest with 671 in membership.⁵⁹ The trends of the 1940s and 1950s continued into the 1960s and the 1970s, not unlike the trend lines for all denominations since 1900, particularly the Free Churches.⁶⁰ Thompson explains,

Since the First World War these Churches have been characterized by an above-average proportion of women in their membership, particularly single women; by an age-structure which is higher than that of the population as a whole; and by lower fertility than the population as a whole. In a situation where recruitment to church membership has been increasingly within the families of church members, these characteristics lead inexorably to decline. The deaths suffered in two world wars have certainly played their part in this, but wider social change is also involved. The increasing freedom felt by members to marry members of other denominations, or none, has weakened family loyalty to a particular denomination at a parental level, whilst the increasing problem of retaining the loyalty of children of church members gives a further savage twist to the spiral of decline.⁶¹

This exposes a church tradition which had increasingly turned inward, become insulated from its cultural context, and lost influence upon people far from God. As the 1946 Conference president lamented, with some pining for years gone by, "we have settled down to being respectable Christians with respectable incomes and respectable views."⁶²

⁵⁷ The Christian Association was a similar stream of churches which had refrained from aligning with the ACC on matters of communion and baptism. Some called them "American churches" because they were either established by American evangelists or it was felt they were more influenced by the American side of the Restoration Movement. See Thompson, *Let Sects and Parties Fall*, 109ff., and James DeForest Murch, *Christians Only: A History of the Restoration Movement* (Cincinnati: Standard Pub., 1962), 330.

⁵⁸ Thompson, *Let Sects and Parties Fall*, 127.

⁵⁹ Watters, *History of the British Churches of Christ*, 112.

⁶⁰ Currie, Gilbert, and Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers*, 17, 73. Cited in Thompson, *Let Sects and Parties Fall*, 162.

⁶¹ Thompson, *Let Sects and Parties Fall*, 162.

⁶² Leslie Colver, *Association of Churches of Christ Year Book* (1946): 28. Cited in Thompson, *Let Sects and Parties Fall*, 163.

It is no surprise, then, that ecumenical relationships became the *raison d'être* for the ACC's existence (and future dissolution). In the face of increasing isolation from the culture at large, and the loss of urgency to see people come to faith and follow Jesus, the Association increasingly looked to express the unity of the Church by merging with other denominational church bodies.⁶³ As early as 1948 proposals for closer cooperation with the Baptist Union were explored, but these faded after a few years. A renewed attempt with the Baptist Union in 1966 also fell to the wayside. This was quickly replaced in the same year with hopes for organic union with The Congregational-Presbyterian Joint Committee, precursor to the United Reformed Church (URC).⁶⁴ The reasons for considering merger are, of course, complex, but the Annual Conference agreed to discuss merger with the newly formed URC in 1972. Subsequently, this led to the decision in early 1979 to undertake the dissolution of the Association.⁶⁵ The Conference decision to dissolve into the URC was by no means unanimous. Fifty-four churches voted for dissolution. Thompson glosses over the acrimony and dissension that characterized the debate in the year or two before the vote for dissolution and merger with the URC.⁶⁶ Not

⁶³ Dan Yarnell comments that "This [pursuit for ecumenicity locally and nationally] may also have been a missiological response since John 17 had often been a rallying cry for Churches of Christ, so it would seem natural to develop ecumenical engagements as a fulfillment to the ethos and mission of Churches of Christ." Dan Yarnell, e-mail comment, Redditch, UK, February 25, 2011.

⁶⁴ Thompson, *Let Sects and Parties Fall*, 185, 190. The URC is a merger of the Presbyterian Church of England and the Congregational Church in England and Wales, in 1972. After the dissolution of the ACC, a Re-formed Association of Churches of Christ was formed as a legal entity to merge with the URC in 1981. Scotch Congregationalists merged with the URC in 2000. See Thompson, 197, and The United Reformed Church, "About Us," http://www.urc.org.uk/about/about_us (accessed March 11, 2010).

⁶⁵ Ibid., 191, 197. Formal dissolution took place March 31, 1980, by an Act of Parliament. Dan Yarnell, e-mail comment, Redditch, UK, February 25, 2011.

⁶⁶ Thompson is not entirely neutral. As the primary source for ACC history since A.C. Watters' 1948 *History of the British Churches of Christ*, he was on the side of merger; indeed, he was president of Conference in 1979 in overseeing the voting process, and visited churches to promote the merger.

a few saw this process as an abandonment of a core value: the unity of the Church on the basis of fidelity to the Scriptures so "*that the world may believe*" (John 17:21; the emphasis is mine). At least twenty churches viewed this decision for organic union with the URC as a move to abandon the second part of the plea.⁶⁷

Indeed, giving up on the second part of that plea inevitably started a progression from mission to maintenance to death, hence one observer's comment that the forty-two churches which joined the URC⁶⁸ "were looking for an honorable way to die," and sadly, most of those have done just that, and passed away from existence.⁶⁹ Recent URC figures indicate there are currently between 75,000 and 100,000 members in 1600 congregations, a far cry from the 192,136 with which it began in 1972.⁷⁰ The 2005 English Church Census reports 1470 URC churches and an attendance drop within these churches of 43 percent between 1998 and 2005, the greatest decline of any English denomination.⁷¹

Those opting not to merge set about continuing a cooperative relationship in the Fellowship of Churches of Christ (FCC). This launched September 1979 in Birmingham with a Trust Deed signed January 1980 in Edinburgh.⁷² An article in the first newsletter

⁶⁷ Thompson, *Let Sects and Parties Fall*, 197.

⁶⁸ Martin Robinson, "A New Future Emerges: Martin Robinson Reflects on 30 Years of Change," *The Fellowship of Churches of Christ in Great Britain and Ireland Newsletter* 218 (March/April 2009): 3.

⁶⁹ Martin Robinson, phone interview by author, Birmingham, UK, March 12, 2010.

⁷⁰ The URC website indicates 100,000, while Martin Robinson gives a figure of 81,638 in 2004; see The United Reformed Church, "About Us," and Martin Robinson, *Planting Mission-shaped Churches Today* (Oxford: Monarch, 2006), 31.

⁷¹ Evangelical Alliance, "2005 Church Census," <http://www.eauk.org/resources/info/statistics/2005englishchurchcensus.cfm> (accessed February 25, 2010).

⁷² Dick Whitehouse, "30 Years Old - Poised for Take Off?" *The Fellowship of Churches of Christ in Great Britain and Ireland Newsletter* 218 (March/April 2009): 1.

of the FCC emphasized three principles: one, the autonomy of the local church where "we are convinced that it is in the local church that we see the *real* church"; two, "the local church is autonomous, but it is not an island" and effective evangelism requires fellowship together; and three, a determination to foster growth in the local church, but more than this, to establish new congregations.⁷³

And so, the Fellowship officially began with twenty-five member churches.⁷⁴ Of the seventy-five churches prior to merger, these tended to be the smaller and more independent-minded congregations. Remarkably, only one of these churches had a paid minister. There were no training facilities, and the total membership of these churches was less than a thousand with an aging profile. In the last thirty years, nine of these have closed. Currently, as a result of church planting and new affiliations, and in contrast to these closures, approximately thirty churches cooperate as members of the Fellowship.⁷⁵

American Partnerships with the Fellowship of Churches of Christ after 1980

Early on, the primary American influence on the Movement in the UK came through the writings and occasional visits of leaders from the States. During Campbell's 1847 visit, a request to him was made "to select from the American churches a brother who, in his judgment, is the most suitable to labour among the congregations in England."⁷⁶ A renewed request came in 1855, and consideration for another request in

⁷³ Whitehouse, "30 Years Old - Poised for Take Off?" 1, quoting Martin Robinson.

⁷⁴ Robinson, "A New Future Emerges," 3. Forty-two of the seventy-five churches joined the URC, at least eight remained independent, and some joined the Baptist Union or other denominations.

⁷⁵ The Fellowship of Churches of Christ, "Churches," <http://www.fellowshipcc.co.uk/html/churches.html> (accessed March 9, 2010).

⁷⁶ Watters, *History of the British Churches of Christ*, 42.

1864 which was mirrored by an appeal on the American side for two missionaries "to visit the churches [in Great Britain] and plant new ones."⁷⁷ Response to these requests was hardly enthusiastic, but some evangelists from America did embark on evangelistic campaigns from time to time, particularly during the two decades around the turn of the century,⁷⁸ and not without some accompanying tensions about style and theological practice.⁷⁹ Certainly, a minor tradition of links and partnerships, along with tensions of one degree or another, continued on into the new century and beyond.⁸⁰

The 1970s saw the beginnings of more substantial partnerships than those known before. One "partnership" began when an elder from the Hillfields (Coventry) church invited Roger Edrington (an American) to lead a summer team comprised of students from Lincoln Christian College (Lincoln, Illinois) in 1970. This continued for several summers, leading to a more established mixed-gender team of five to seven (and at one point in time, nine) being in place from 1973 to 1979 in Coventry in an inner-city situation.⁸¹ By 1980, members of this team had also begun to filter to Hinckley and Erdington, such that five churches were being directly assisted by American personnel.⁸²

⁷⁷ Watters, *History of the British Churches of Christ*, 52, 64, and Thompson, *Let Sects and Parties Fall*, 78.

⁷⁸ Many of these new churches were part of the Christian Association, the majority of whom eventually joined the ACC. Martin Robinson, interview by author, Birmingham, UK, December 11, 2010.

⁷⁹ One tension was the American practice to neither "invite nor debar" individuals to communion. The British practice only allowed known immersed believers. See Murch, *Christians Only*, 330.

⁸⁰ Thompson, *Let Sects and Parties Fall*, 171ff.

⁸¹ Peter Bowen, e-mail correspondence with author, Birmingham UK, March 20, 2010.

⁸² C. Robert Wetzel, "Child of Providence: British Churches Plan for Future," *Christian Standard* (May 4, 1980): 7.

By the mid-1980s, some twenty-five Americans were resident and supporting Restoration Movement churches in the UK.⁸³ While a few new workers came as independent missionaries in the 1980s and 1990s, most of these American workers who labored with existing churches in a traditional ministry capacity gradually returned to America because of a combination of poor results, inadequate funding, or internal church tensions over leadership styles and maintenance mindsets.⁸⁴ Significantly, these partnerships had formed mostly and initially with churches which chose to cooperate together in the Fellowship, or remained independent of the URC merger.⁸⁵

Another significant partnership from the late 1970s was with the British American Fellowship Committee (BAFC).⁸⁶ This, in part, had its roots in a 1975 sabbatical in Cambridge by Bob Wetzel, lecturer at Milligan College in Johnson City, Tennessee. There he met David Thompson (Fellow at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, and later, president of Conference of the ACC in 1979), and Roger Edrington, who invited him to Coventry to view the work there. With the decline of Overdale and the imminent vote for merger with the URC, Edrington asked Wetzel to start a theological training college.

In 1978, as described in his words, Wetzel "rounded up some Anglophile friends" and formed the BAFC. A research trip to the UK followed in March 1979. During that

⁸³ This included churches from the Fellowship and several unaffiliated churches located in Wigan (Hindley), Wisbech, and London, among others. These are not to be confused with the "restorationist" churches of this time period (see Chapter 2 for further discussion on these churches).

⁸⁴ These are my personal observations.

⁸⁵ Jan Bowen, phone interview by author, Birmingham, UK, March 9, 2010. Jan was a member of the original Lincoln Christian College team. She married a British resident and still lives in the UK.

⁸⁶ Bob Wetzel, phone interview by author, Birmingham, UK, March 8, 2010. What follows rely on Wetzel's personal anecdotes, Peter and Jan Bowen's personal experience on the Lincoln team, and the author's anecdotal information garnered over the years. See also Wetzel, "Child of Providence," 7-8.

trip, he met Philip Morgan, general secretary of the ACC.⁸⁷ Morgan, firmly behind merger, was not pleased with the proposed plans.⁸⁸ Later in the year, Alan Robinson (former ACC missionary in India and father to Martin Robinson) visited Wetzel in Tennessee to confirm the request to start a theological training college.⁸⁹

Wetzel and the BAFC had raised sufficient funds by March 1980 so he could make the move to Selly Oak, Birmingham (where Overdale had been located) in June 1980, joined by his wife (Bonnie) later that year. In addition, Alan Robinson, his son Martin, Richard Swain and Andy Nichols formed a charity named the Christian Renewal Trust (CRT). The CRT had raised enough funds to make a down payment on a house and property that became the Wetzels' home and initial location for The Christian Center for Study and Growth; BAFC funds paid off the mortgage. The first classes were held there in autumn 1980 with sixteen or seventeen students.

Wetzel set about developing relationships with Selly Oak Federation of Colleges, with which Overdale had formerly been connected. Within two years, at a speedier pace than was thought possible, the newly named Springdale College became a partner college in the Federation.⁹⁰ This was not without some trepidation, as suspicions of the American contingent ran deep. At this time, John Ferguson was president of the Federation, and

⁸⁷ In the UK, a "secretary" or "general secretary" role is more akin to that of a CEO; a "president" is one who "presides" or chairs a meeting according to accepted rules of debate and decision-making.

⁸⁸ Bob Wetzel, phone interview by author, Birmingham, UK, March 8, 2010.

⁸⁹ Wetzel, "Child of Providence," 8. Martin Robinson also mentions making several trips to see Wetzel, while serving a one-year ministry apprentice experience in Indianapolis, IN. Martin Robinson, interview by author, Birmingham, UK, December 11, 2010.

⁹⁰ While some wanted to retain the Overdale name and others were opposed, a compromise arose when one of the properties being considered for purchase was known to have springs in it. "Springdale" retained some of the old name with a new and fresh feel. Bob Wetzel, phone interview by author, Birmingham, UK, March 8, 2010.

Lesslie Newbigin was lecturer on the theology of mission.⁹¹ Some felt these suspicions were due to aspersions cast on Wetzel and the British American Fellowship / Christian Renewal Trust partnership by former ACC leadership (Newbigin was Moderator of the URC in 1978-79; it is not hard to imagine what might have been said to him), and because of Newbigin's experience with a Churches of Christ missionary in India.⁹² A nod of approval by Newbigin gave Springdale the link it needed to develop as an institution.

In 1984, a property on Weoley Park Road near the Selly Oak Colleges became available, and it was purchased with the first students moving in and classes launched that autumn. The property next door, a house, was purchased the following year and became the Principal's residence. Wetzel finished his role in launching the college and getting it on firm footing in December 1991. He left to take up a role as Professor of Ethics and Philosophical Theology at Emmanuel Christian Seminary (formerly known as Emmanuel School of Religion) in Johnson City, Tennessee, a Christian Churches / Churches of Christ graduate seminary, becoming president in 1994, and retiring in 2010.

Springdale had a challenged history in the decade after Wetzel's departure. Dennis Lindsay, while an able replacement as Principal (April 1992 to April 2000),⁹³ faced the recurring challenge of dwindling student numbers, just as Overdale in the 1970s.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Lawrence Osborn, "Lesslie Newbigin (1909-1998)," <http://osbloggery.blogspot.com/2009/12/lesslie-newbigin-19091998.html> (accessed December 8, 2009).

⁹² Bob Wetzel, phone interview by author, Birmingham, UK, March 8, 2010.

⁹³ Dennis Lindsay, e-mail correspondence with author, Birmingham, UK, March 15, 2010.

⁹⁴ This decline was in contrast to the slight rise in overall places and students at theological colleges across Britain. See Heather Wraight, Vicky Wharton and others, *UK Christian Handbook 2007/2008* (London: Christian Research, 2006) 51. Table 5.3.1 of that page shows the rise in student numbers between 1997 and 2006: 6,250 (1997), 7,150 (1999), 7,400 (2001), 7,580 (2003), and 8,280 (2006).

Dependence on American personnel to staff the College (gifted though they were), without roots and experience in British culture, sometimes made the College feel like an American enclave.⁹⁵ An attempted merger with Birmingham Bible Institute initiated in 1998 succeeded in combining faculty, campuses, and students, but failed to merge constitutionally as Birmingham Christian College at the last minute in 2002.⁹⁶ While retaining the new name, the college went on to lease another property remaining as an independent body while the Springdale Trust as a registered charity retained the original property.⁹⁷ This property was sold after Springdale Trust and Together in Mission merged and were renamed as "Springdale College: Together in Mission." Springdale, with Martin Robinson as Director, has essentially become the missional training arm of the Fellowship (though most of her students come from other denominations and networks) using a dispersed campus model to award bachelor's and master's degrees. This expression of Springdale College has become entirely indigenous in the process. The remnant of the BAFC now resides in the makeup of the trustees of the Springdale Trust.

The final significant American partnership of the Fellowship is that with Christian Missionary Fellowship, International (CMF).⁹⁸ CMF is an international church planting organization affiliated with the Christian Churches / Churches of Christ in America. This

⁹⁵ This is a personal observation, confirmed by British and American colleagues familiar with the College and its history.

⁹⁶ Martin Robinson, phone interview by author, Birmingham, UK, March 10, 2010.

⁹⁷ BCC's struggle to exist as a viable institution of higher education suffered a severe setback in autumn 2010 when the trustees determined to cease pursuing a renewed validation of her degree program with the University of Wales. Springdale College: Together in Mission has subsequently taken responsibility for BCC's remaining B.Th. students. Dan Yarnell, personal conversation, Redditch, UK, December 2, 2010, and Dick Whitehouse, personal conversation, Solihull, UK, December 3, 2010.

⁹⁸ Information for this partnership is based on personal experience and internal CMF documents.

partnership, to date, is the most enduring and active in the history of the Fellowship. This partnership began when Jim Smith, CMF's director at that time, visited England in 1987 and 1988 to determine if it met CMF's policy for entry. Subsequently, the Fellowship issued an invitation, and CMF accepted, on the stipulation that work would not focus on existing churches, and that church planters would be paired with British personnel.

The first two CMF families arrived in 1989, and after one year a church plant was established in Yaxley, Peterborough, though the planting family had to return to the States. Other families arrived between 1990 and 1994, and these families formed as the CMF Great Britain Field Team (GBFT) by 1993. Between 1989 and 2010 the GBFT has had thirteen "long-term service" families and three singles on the team, with numerous summer interns and short-term workers. There have been as many as eight families at one time. Currently there are four families; each family has been on the team for a minimum of seventeen years to a maximum of twenty years. While some non-CMF church plants were attempted in the 1970s and 1980s with limited success, the GBFT essentially became the church planting arm of the Fellowship in the 1990s and first decade of the new millennium. Early on, it became apparent that no British partners would be available to work with the church planting families. Furthermore, ongoing dissension in the FCC in the early 1990s between a more progressive and missional element and a more traditional and conservative coalition chilled the partnership and stalled forward movement in the Fellowship. For the most part, the GBFT determined to steer clear of these difficulties by getting on with the task at hand.

The experience of the first CMF family in Yaxley which required their return to America, along with the lack of British partners, influenced the team to form a strategy to

work as mini-teams in fewer locations. Church plants followed in Bromsgrove, Worcester, Northampton, and Dickens Heath by 2008. Early in the decade, a plant in Wigston, Leicester by two English families (one with connections to the GBFT) abruptly collapsed after two years. Likewise, in 2003, the Yaxley church was unable to continue after fourteen years existence.

As team members transitioned out of successful church plants, and with years of experience working in the culture, the mini-teams strategy became less important. Each team family is now engaged in separate strategies and locations in Worcester, Solihull, Nottingham, and Rugby. Their diverse strategies include efforts to plant a youth church, a church targeting the twenties and thirties clubbing culture, a simple church network, and a strategy still being formed but focused on developing local discipling partnerships while helping another local church launch a church plant / second campus. At the same time as GBFT team members diversified strategies and locations, and animosities within the Fellowship declined, the two increasingly saw their aims as mutual and greater cooperation ensued.

The story of the Restoration Movement from the early 1800s in the UK as seen in the decline of the Association of Churches of Christ and its rebirth in the form of the Fellowship of Churches of Christ in the late 1900s is only part of a larger narrative. While "internal issues" may differ between denominations and streams of churches, all face the uncertainty of cultural change and how to respond. The Church in England, cross-denominationally, has responded to these challenges and to decline in a variety of ways. Some of these have been healthy; many have not. The next chapter turns to describing and reflecting on some of these responses.

CHAPTER 2

RESPONSES TO DECLINE OF THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH

Forecasts of the inevitable cessation of the UK Church's life and influence by commentators such as Callum Brown make for a grim picture of the future. Still, though the institutional Church in England has declined and experienced being pushed to the margins of national life, one should not assume that there has been no attempt to form a missional response.¹ Moreover, other surprising and emerging expressions of church from the margins and from the outside of institutional Church life evidence a response to cultural change and marginalization. This chapter will focus on those responses in both which demonstrate new forms of church and church planting.

Charismatic Renewal and the Rise of New Churches

About the same time of the great social change of the 1960s described by Brown, another wind of change, known as "charismatic renewal," was silently under way cross-denominationally. Earlier in the century, the Pentecostal revival popularly understood as

¹ A broad understanding of "institutional Church" is used here, as referring to those churches or denominations structured in a hierarchical fashion, focused on traditional liturgy or Sunday worship event, have multiple decision making layers, and have a limited fluid response to cultural change, whether they have existed a few decades or centuries. Some have begun using "inherited" or "legacy" Church. Stuart Murray, *Church after Christendom*, After Christendom (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2004), 99ff.

originating in California² had gradually become a global movement by the mid-1930s and with a presence in the UK from 1908.³ Where established churches rejected charismatic gifts and the baptism in the Holy Spirit, new Pentecostal denominational groupings formed independent of existing church traditions; to what extent the seeds of later charismatic renewal had been planted in this period remains unclear. What is clear is that the charismatic renewal of the 1960s and 1970s largely "brought the pentecostal experience into the old denominations."⁴ William Kay goes on to explain, making a distinction between these earlier Pentecostals and those in this new generation who sought renewal:

This new spiritual movement took place around the world within denominational groups that had previously rejected the pentecostal movement 40 or 50 years before. Many of the same phenomena were to be found. There were home prayer meetings, there was spiritual excitement, lay Christians were empowered, there was prayer for healing and there were prophecies. The charismatic movement functioned interdenominationally, and, within this [book's current] chapter, those who were committed to it are labeled "renewalists" since they wished to renew denominational churches from the inside but not to alter the structures or doctrines that had been so carefully constructed over many years.⁵

² The commonly accepted understanding is that the Azusa Street Revival of 1906 in Los Angeles lay at the origins of the Pentecostal movement. That the story is more complex is argued by Edith Blumhofer who writes that while Azusa Street "had a vital role in shaping the contours of worldwide Pentecostalism," it was one of several international "impulses that birthed a distinctly Pentecostal form of Christianity." Edith Blumhofer, "Azusa Street Revival," *The Christian Century* (March 7, 2006), <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2006-03/azusa-street-revival> (accessed November 15, 2010).

³ William K. Kay, *Apostolic Networks of Britain: New Ways of Being Church*, Studies in Evangelical History and Thought (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), 3-4, and Martin Robinson, interview by author, Birmingham, UK, December 11, 2010. Elim churches date their start to 1915; the Assemblies of God from 1924. See Elim Pentecostal Churches, "About Us," <http://www.elim.org.uk/Group/Group.aspx?ID=109185> (accessed December 16, 2010), and Assemblies of God, "Our Journey So Far is an Exciting One," <http://www.aog.org.uk/pages/14-our-history/content> (accessed December 15, 2010).

⁴ Kay, *Apostolic Networks*, 19.

⁵ Ibid., 19. By "this chapter," Kay refers to his discussion in the pages following the quote which differentiates those who preferred to work within their current denominational frameworks over and against those who argued that wholesale restoration of the church was required.

There was one significant exception to this reality in the English setting. Some espoused greater change than that allowed within traditional church structures. Feeling constrained, and spirits moved by their experiences with the Holy Spirit, groups meeting in homes or other facilities apart from traditional buildings sprang up across the country. While constituting as separate churches was not the aim in many cases, such a result was often inevitable.⁶ An initial designation for this phenomenon labeled these new churches as "House Churches,"⁷ even if meeting in homes was neither the focus, nor the primary and initial meeting place for many.⁸ Their rise in the national picture is significant. As Walker notes, "They are the largest and most significant Christian formation to emerge in Great Britain in over half a century," the earlier being the 1920s establishment of Elim and Assemblies of God.⁹ By the year 2000, some 20 "streams" could be identified.¹⁰

Many of these churches had what has been called a "restorationist" theology.¹¹ As Stuart Murray describes, "They believed and taught that their 'new way of being church' would supersede older models [of church]" and usher in a great revival in preparation for

⁶ Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom*, 268ff.

⁷ Stuart Murray, *Changing Mission: Learning From the Newer Churches* (London: Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, 2006), 5.

⁸ Andrew Walker, "Crossing the Restorationist Rubicon: From House Church to New Church," in *Fundamentalism, Church and Society*, ed. Martyn Percy and Ian Jones (London: SPCK, 2002), 54.

⁹ Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom*, 36. Walker prefers the term "kingdom people" in order to provide a conceptual focus which goes "right to the heart of the new movements," and to "orient readers to a religious movement outside the recognized denominations." See Walker, 35.

¹⁰ Murray, *Changing Mission*, 5. The five largest are New Frontiers International (NFI), Pioneer, Vineyard, Ichthus Christian Fellowship, and Cornerstone; see Peter Brierley, *The Tide Is Running Out: What the English Church Attendance Survey Reveals* (London: Christian Research, 2000), 41.

¹¹ "Restorationist" or "Restorationist Movement" language, as developed by Walker describes a distinct historical development different from the "Restoration Movement" previously noted regarding the Fellowship of Churches of Christ. See Walker, "Crossing the Restorationist Rubicon: From House Church to New Church," 56.

the return of Christ.¹² Their theological impetus was "built on a big idea, the idea that the church needed to be restored to its primitive glory."¹³ This movement of new churches, while rising out of the "flurry of activity and excitement that the charismatic movement of the 1960s and 1970s brought in its train," was distinct from the charismatic renewal.¹⁴

In their first two decades, these new churches were hives of activity and growth,¹⁵ showing "ecclesial creativity" and "fresh thinking in worship, spiritual gifts, healing, leadership, community, and much else."¹⁶ In this chaotic atmosphere as people explored and experienced being part of these new churches vis-à-vis the older traditional churches, movement of people in and out was "considerable," and a mid-1980s survey showed that a third of members in these new churches came from other denominations.¹⁷ By the mid-1990s, however, this activity and growth had declined significantly, and it appeared to some observers that this movement had become more about reviving "an old model of church rather than a new model."¹⁸ While precise figures are not supplied by Brierley, his research indicates that of new churches opened in the period 1989-1998, over 50 percent of these were from the New Churches; throw the Pentecostal churches into the mix and

¹² Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom*, 5-6. Walker identifies two significant strands of restorationism as R1 and R2. R1 churches were more idealistic and conservative about the need of a return to the pristine order of the New Testament Church for the unity of the Church, while the R2 were more open and liberal about what that means; see 38ff. Kay argues that his empirical data supports the R1 and R2 thesis about the "relative openness to ecumenical and cooperative influences." See Kay, *Apostolic Networks*, 51.

¹³ Kay, *Apostolic Networks*, 21.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Brierley, *The Tide Is Running Out*, 39.

¹⁶ Murray, *Changing Mission*, 6.

¹⁷ Brierley, *UK Christian Handbook*, 39-40. Walker illustrates in case studies the tensions behind the movement of people in and out of the New Churches. See Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom*, 268ff.

¹⁸ Murray, *Changing Mission*, 6. Helpfully, Murray goes on to outline lessons which can be learned from the brief historical review of the New Churches.

upwards of 65 percent of new churches opened reflect the impact of the Pentecostal movement and charismatic renewal.¹⁹

Church Planting and the Cross-Denominational Response to Decline from 1990

In 1988, the Anglican Lambeth Conference resolved, "in cooperation with other Christians, to make the closing years of this millennium a 'Decade of Evangelism' with a renewed and united emphasis on making Christ known to the people of his world."²⁰ This resolution was welcomed by other denominations and Christian organizations, longing for a plausible successor to Billy Graham's high profile evangelistic campaigns, and yearning for some means to stop the loss of credibility and bleeding of church members from their ranks.²¹ By 1994, no less than three major evangelistic campaigns were being supported by evangelicals cross-denominationally.²² These coincided with significant (but unsustainable) growth in the Evangelical Alliance.²³ Of their results, Warner writes,

The disjunction between the projected and actual results of the 1994 projects was at least ridiculous, perhaps scandalous. Evangelicals had been inspired to make generous donations entirely disproportionate to the actual results. There had been a deeply misguided failure to take account of cultural realities. This risked a widespread collapse of credibility Disillusion leads easily to cynicism, especially in a climate where the secular media customarily report the imminent demise of the church.²⁴

¹⁹ Brierley, *The Tide Is Running Out*, 196, 208.

²⁰ The Lambeth Conference, "Resolutions from 1988: Resolution 43 - Decade of Evangelism," <http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1988/1988-43.cfm> (accessed March 11, 2010).

²¹ Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism*, 99.

²² Ibid. These were JIM (Jesus in Me), Minus to Plus, and On Fire, each with differing nuances.

²³ Ibid., 41ff.

²⁴ Ibid., 105.

Similarly, the approach to church planting during the decade had a "campaign" approach. Cross-denominationally, "church planting," by that or any other name, was largely unknown in the UK in the 1970s, and just coming on the radar in the 1980s.²⁵ Indeed, as noted earlier, the rise of the "New Churches" had made the shrinking seas of Christian denominations more turbulent and chaotic. In addition, for some, talk of new churches on an island dominated by the parish system made it "a disreputable practice associated with fringe movements and subversive groups."²⁶ The language still makes some nervous even to this day.²⁷

Besides the early initiatives of the Church of England (which are not always acknowledged or known), church planting as an intentional initiative was gaining prominence from the late 1980s cross-denominationally. This history is well-documented by UK-based writers Martin Robinson, George Lings, and Stuart Murray (Williams), to which personal observations since 1994 can be added.²⁸ The essential point is that in this

²⁵ Church of England General Synod, *mission-shaped church* (London: CHP, 2004), 16-17. On those same pages the report notes early initiatives and thinking primarily among Anglicans. These include early fresh expressions of church being planted from 1978, with up to 40 a year in 1990-92, and the informal networking for church planting where "within five years an unknown fringe activity had made its way onto the main stage of church thinking and practice." The report also mentions the 1984 book by Monica Hill, *How to Plant Churches* (London: MARC Europe, 1984), which was the first published for the English market.

²⁶ Murray, *Changing Mission*, 14.

²⁷ Stuart Murray Williams, "Church Planting, Fresh Expressions, Emerging Church - What Do We Call It Now?" Incarnate Network, <http://incarnate-network.eu/church-planting-intro/church-planting-fresh-expressions-emerging-church-what-do-we-call-it> (accessed March 10, 2010). See also Stuart Murray, *Planting Churches: A Framework for Practitioners* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), 6ff. Murray and Murray Williams are one and the same; his recent writings favor the former name over the latter.

²⁸ Robinson, *Planting Mission-shaped Churches Today*, 21ff. See esp. George Lings and Stuart Murray, *Church Planting: Past, Present and Future*, Grove Evangelism Series 61 (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2003), Murray, *Changing Mission*, 19ff., and Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism*, 106ff.

period church planting "was coming to be regarded as a mission strategy and not just as a means of meeting particular and unusual needs in new housing areas."²⁹

Briefly, there was enough activity and conversations taking place among Anglicans, Baptists, and Methodists, and other newer networks such as Ichthus, Pioneer, and Harvestime, that a consultation was called in 1991. Some seventy church leaders from twenty different denominations attended. This led to plans for Challenge 2000, a bold but ill-fated initiative to plant twenty thousand churches by the end of the millennium. This was followed by the first of what was intended to be an ongoing series of DAWN Congresses to monitor progress and develop strategy in 1992; a second was held in 1995.³⁰ Both were very well attended having six hundred and one thousand participants, respectively, with every denomination and network represented.³¹

Both were also very wrong in their ambitions, timescale, and underlying methodology to calculate denominational and network responsibilities for reaching the goal of twenty thousand churches. As one who was still a newcomer in the country (and not fully cognizant of what was happening), I well remember the chaos of the regional groupings and being carried along with others in the excitement of the moment to claim a share of the goal. Robinson laments,

Here, a major opportunity was lost. The process in the Congress included breaking into reasonably small regional groups, each of which was provided with their share of the 20,000 goal, divided on a population basis. This clearly highlighted the ridiculous nature of the goals in almost every region. However,

²⁹ Robinson, *Planting Mission-shaped Churches Today*, 21.

³⁰ Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism*, 107. Discipling a Whole Nation (DAWN) was initiated in the Philippines in the 1970s with a church planting goal in that country for the year 2000 based on a church for every one thousand people. See also <http://www.dawnministries.org/>.

³¹ Robinson, *Planting Mission-shaped Churches Today*, 21ff.

there was a combination of inadequate feedback of these findings together with unwillingness among the Challenge 2000 leaders to grasp the nettle and admit that they had got it wrong and must revert to some realism. One result was a massive demoralization and loss of confidence in the grass roots where the mission energy needed to be.³²

Indeed, as the hard reality of actual church plants and closures by denominations hit the immovable rock of unrealistic and unattainable goals for the year 2000, a kind of national silence about church planting reigned over the country. Robinson concludes, "Challenge 2000 as an organization was moribund and it looked as if yet another initiative in the Decade of evangelism had simply failed."³³ It was another eleven years before a national church planting conference was again convened (Mission21). It was held in Sheffield in 2006, with a similar conference in 2009 in Bath, both on a less grandiose scale.

That is not to say that church planting did not remain on the agenda of churches, cross-denominationally. Passage of time provided space to consider what had been achieved. There were churches planted; some two thousand in the 1990s; Alexander Campbell's report at Mission21 (2006) indicated about 506 additional church plants from the beginning of the millennium.³⁴ While the 2006 English Church Census found that 1299 churches in England had closed between 1998 and 2005, it also reported 1083 new churches in that time period.³⁵ On the whole, more churches closed than opened, but

³² Robinson, *Planting Mission-shaped Churches Today*, 27.

³³ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁴ Alexander Campbell, *Mission 21: A Report on Church Planting in the UK Since 2000* (Sheffield: Together in Mission, 2006), 1. Stuart Murray reports that there were 1900 churches planted in that decade, while 2700 churches closed. See Murray, *Changing Mission*, 20.

³⁵ Evangelical Alliance, "Church Plants and Church Closures," <http://www.eauk.org/resources/info/statistics/leadershiplatest37.cfm> (accessed February 18, 2010). These figures include "Fresh Expressions" churches, which are described later in this chapter.

churches were being planted and a more solidly based cross-denominational momentum for church planting was being observed.

This momentum was also building in the Fellowship of Churches of Christ and CMF's team in England. Between 2002 and 2006 conversations and networking between several individuals and these bodies gave rise to a Church Planting Task Group with members from the CMF team and the Fellowship. A prayer goal of ten church plants initiated by 2010 was set and reached. Besides the four current CMF initiated church plant efforts described in the previous chapter, various phases of new church starts are currently under way, which taken together comprise ethnic, traditional, and new forms.³⁶ Other potential situations for new plants and replants are being investigated.

It is true that the disappointments of the Decade of Evangelism loomed large in the memories of those committed to making disciples and planting churches as the first decade of the new millennium unfolded. Significantly, however, lessons were being learned as "the ebbing of church planting energy" gave way to "genuine missionary reflection."³⁷ Some of this reflection revolved around the kind of churches being planted given the post-modern and British post-Christendom context. For instance, it was recognized that the main problem of the campaign approach of the 1990s was a failure to

³⁶ These are in Bradford and Birmingham (ethnic), Druids Heath and Selly Oak in Birmingham (new and traditional forms), Redditch (new form) and Findochty and Edinburgh in Scotland (new forms; however, the promising church plant in Findochty recently closed when a key leader ceased involvement). The "ethnic" church plants are those led by non-White immigrants to the UK among non-White residents and immigrant populations. The Selly Oak church plant is related to the work of the CMF sponsored Globalscope campus ministry at the University of Birmingham known as Canvas. A further Globalscope campus ministry has been approved (November 2010) for Edinburgh by the CMF Board.

³⁷ Robinson, *Planting Mission-shaped Churches Today*, 29. Murray's *Changing Mission* further details some of the mood of the decade's failures and subsequent reflection which took place; see 14ff.

take the cultural context seriously,³⁸ as was the recognition that much of the church planting of the 1990s was a form of cloning.³⁹

What is sometimes missed is that "genuine missionary reflection" in regards to the contextual soil was also taking place from outside the mainstream. The Decade of Evangelism and church planting conferences to a large extent came from more of a "top-down" and institutional impetus. In contrast, there were those from the margins and the "bottom" contemplating new forms of church and church planting, and that is the subject of the next section.

Forms of Church and Church Planting in the Response to Decline from 1990

Around 1990 and thereafter in the UK, there are broadly three strands or categories of new forms of church which appeared and are relevant to this paper. These three broad categories are first, emerging forms of church, second, Fresh Expressions (FE) of church, and third, simple forms of church. These categories or strands are not altogether distinct from one another and there is ample overlap between them. Also, it is not necessarily the case that these approaches to being church or the forms which developed were intended to be new churches, comprise a church planting strategy, or be divorced from and independent of traditional institutional Church structures.

"Emerging church" is the prevailing terminology currently used to describe those groups which have "bubbled up" in various places and contexts internationally. Strictly speaking, an "emerging church" is simply a (new) community of believers whose life of

³⁸ Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism*, 100.

³⁹ Murray, *Planting Churches: A Framework for Practitioners*, 2. See also Church of England General Synod, *mission-shaped church*, 20-21.

discipleship, worship, and service arises out of and takes shape in a local context, but the term also describes a kind of conversation brought into being, in part, by institutional Church decline. According to John Drane, this discussion reflects concerns of traditional denominational church leaders to missionally engage changing culture, query the nature of the Church, and appropriately contextualize the Christian faith in a manner that honors one's church heritage while making the Gospel accessible to the unchurched.⁴⁰ This corresponds to George Lings' observation that "the phrase 'Emerging church' is an attempt to express succinctly the re-imagining of church that has been taking place in the last 20 years as a response to our rapidly changing UK mission context."⁴¹

Overall, this conversation in the UK has been congenial, creative, and positive in tone. In contrast, Drane writes, the conversation in North America has been unhelpfully tinged by angry and disillusioned Christians from a predominantly "conservative evangelical, fundamentalist, and sometimes charismatic" experience of church.⁴² Moreover, in a typically American entrepreneurial and independent-minded fashion, these Christians have gone on to create new churches apart from mainline church traditions and without meaningful dialogue with them in the missional task.⁴³

⁴⁰ John William Drane, "The Emerging Church," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 6, no. 1 (March 2006): 4.

⁴¹ George Lings, "What is Emerging Church?" [emergingchurch.info](http://www.emergingchurch.info/reflection/georgelings/index.htm), <http://www.emergingchurch.info/reflection/georgelings/index.htm> (accessed November 22, 2010).

⁴² Drane, "The Emerging Church," 4. Drane's editorial provides a helpful background summary. As a resource on the American situation, see Scot McKnight, "Five Streams of the Emerging Church," *Christianity Today* (January 19, 2007), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/february/11.35.html> (accessed November 22, 2010). For a tentative classification of emerging churches in the UK context, see Murray, *Church after Christendom*, 93. Finally, see also the loose typology provided by Scott Bader-Saye, "Improvising Church: An Introduction to the Emerging Church Conversation," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 6, no. 1 (March 2006): 13-14.

⁴³ Drane, "The Emerging Church," 4.

Into this mix comes what are being called "Fresh Expressions" (FE) of church. The term comes from the 2004 Church of England *mission-shaped church* report, which says this in its introduction: "We understand 'church planting' to refer to the discipline of 'creating new communities of Christian faith as part of the mission of God to express God's kingdom in every geographic and cultural context.' 'Fresh expressions of church' are manifestations of this, but they also give evidence of many parishes' attempts to make a transition into a more missionary form of church."⁴⁴ There is no doubt that this cross-denominationally approved strategy has significant traction in the UK.⁴⁵ George Lings stated in early 2009 that 39 percent of Anglican churches had started a FE church.⁴⁶

Using older criteria of what constitutes a FE, there are to date some 2700 congregations, church plants, and new initiatives, of which about 1800 are Anglican in origin.⁴⁷ Considerable work by George Lings and The Sheffield Centre is under way to refine what legitimately qualifies as a FE within the Church of England. One of their aims in analyzing data already collected is to "establish fair yet firmer criteria about what

⁴⁴ Church of England General Synod, *mission-shaped church*, xii.

⁴⁵ Roots of *mission-shaped church* can be found in an earlier report that was, in part, generated because of "unauthorized" church plants across parish boundaries. Church of England Board of Mission Working Party on Church Planting, *Breaking New Ground: Church Planting in the Church of England* (London: CHP, 1994), v. Partners in FEs include the Church of England, Methodists, Ground Level Network, URC, Congregational Federation, Church Army, Church Mission Society, and Anglican Church Planting Initiatives. From Fresh Expressions, "Fresh Expressions Media Pack," <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/media> (accessed November 25, 2010). The Church of Scotland issued a similar report in 2001, calling for, among other things, new churches and new paths for discipleship. See The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, "Church Without Walls: What's It All About?" <http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/churchwithoutwalls/cwwreports.htm#2001> (accessed January 21, 2011), and The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, "A Church Without Walls," <http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/churchwithoutwalls/cwwreports.htm#2001> (accessed January 21, 2011).

⁴⁶ Stated in an informal presentation at the Incarnate House Party, an annual gathering of church planting practitioners, at Somersal Cottages, Ashbourne, March 2, 2009. See <http://incarnate-network.eu/>.

⁴⁷ Rob Powys-Smith, Research Executive, Christian Research, personal e-mail correspondence from Christian Research database and individual church data, January 18, 2011.

counts as a fresh expression of church."⁴⁸ The number as of early 2009 appears, more accurately, to be somewhat less than 800 (when data collection by the national FE team ceased and was passed over to Lings and the Church Army, and discounting anything earlier than 1992).⁴⁹ Among Methodists, one of the partners in the FE initiative, a report of statistics through 2009 identified an adjusted number of 893 FEs of church.⁵⁰

For some in the Church of England, FEs are not valid forms of church since they do not fit the traditional Anglican mold.⁵¹ Indeed, Anglican mold or shape aside, it is still likely that not all of these "fresh expressions" of church are actually church plants (or even, if "church planting" should be the operative descriptor).⁵² Many are simply ways of being or doing church which are being tried alongside traditional and institutional ways of being church (which, as new initiatives for many of these churches, should not be discounted or maligned).⁵³ Pete Ward, Kester Brewin, and Ian Mobsby challenge the

⁴⁸ George Lings, The Sheffield Centre – Church Army's Research Unit, e-mail correspondence with author, January 27, 2011.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ "Some local reports have overstated the number of FEs. The data have been adjusted according to the assumption that the number of people attending was entered in place of the number of 'Expressions.' Every District except the Channel Islands was represented, with 893 FEs altogether. They have identified four major types as Café Church, Messy Church, Third Place and Cell Group." See The Methodist Church, "The Full Statistics for Mission Report and Resource Pack," <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/re-full-smr-rep-and-resource-pk-0709101.pdf> (accessed November 25, 2010), 33.

⁵¹ The question "When does a fresh expression of church become a mature community?" is a matter of some discussion in Anglican circles. See Angela Shier-Jones, *Pioneer Ministry and Fresh Expressions of Church* (London: SPCK, 2009) 56-57.

⁵² Murray, *Planting Churches*, 8. See also Steven Croft, "What Counts as a Fresh Expression of Church and Who Decides?" in *Evaluating Fresh Expressions: Explorations in Emerging Church - Responses to the Changing Face of Ecclesiology in the Church of England*, ed. Louise Nelstrop and Martyn Percy (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2008), 3-14.

⁵³ Stephen Cottrell picks up on this, arguing that "many Fresh Expressions would be much better understood as mission initiatives." See Stephen Cottrell, "The Baby and the Parochial Bathwater," *Church Times*, no. 7706 (November 26, 2010), <http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/content.asp?id=104437> (accessed January 17, 2011).

view that Fresh Expressions are forms of emerging church. Mobsby argues, for example (and key to the debate about emerging church), that only those forms of church which emerge as a result of exercising a contextual theology from a post-Christendom and post-modern mindset can properly be called "emerging." In this view, according to Mobsby, only three of the fourteen categories—alternative worship communities, café church, and network-focused churches—can properly be called "emerging."⁵⁴

Simple forms of church are the last to consider here. First are those forms which come under the term "Simple Church." Second are those groups which intentionally go by the name "missional community" or use the language of "missional community" to describe themselves. As to the first, names such as Simple Church, Organic Church, and sometimes Home Church or House Church are used, though there are many others.⁵⁵ While there are nuances of meaning in these different terms, the overlap between them is more significant. J.D. Payne illustrates this when he provides five descriptors of house churches: "more organic, less institutional," "more simple, less structure," "more participatory worship, less passivity," "more community, less acquaintances," and "more ministers and less Ministers."⁵⁶ Here, using Simple Church will suffice.

⁵⁴ Ian Mobsby, *Emerging and Fresh Expressions of Church: How are They Authentically Church and Anglican?* (London: Moot Community Publishing, 2007), 31, but see the entire discussion, 19-31. Similarly, see also Louise Nelstrop, "Mixed Economy or Ecclesial Reciprocity: Which Does the Church of England Really Want to Promote?" in *Evaluating Fresh Expressions: Explorations in Emerging Church - Responses to the Changing Face of Ecclesiology in the Church of England*, ed. Louise Nelstrop and Martyn Percy (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2008), 192-96.

⁵⁵ This is not to be confused with the House Churches and their evolution to New Churches and Apostolic Networks. Cell Church has some similarities to these forms and representation in England, but besides these, base community, deliberately simple, microchurch, MiniChurch, household church and other similar vocabulary is currently being used. No exhaustive attempt is made to list these designations, sources, and nuances as there are too many to consider.

⁵⁶ J. D. Payne, *Missional House Churches: Reaching Our Communities with the Gospel* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), 37-43.

Roger Thoman offers a definition of simple church as "a loose-knit network of Jesus followers who gather together to encourage each other in their spiritual life and who go out, moved by the Holy Spirit, sharing and demonstrating the Gospel."⁵⁷ These basic ecclesial communities, conceptually, are distinguished by an intentional simplicity in every aspect of community life together, from worship to mission to ministry. They are also distinguished by keeping the structures to support community life simple and uncomplicated in contrast to institutional Church. They are concerned with reproducing themselves. Jesus is the focus, and the Holy Spirit speaks to and moves the community. In addition, these forms of church do not usually have a direct (accountability and support) connection with existing or traditional forms of church.

"Missional community" is used in a specific and a generic sense. As a specific reference it originates with Mike Breen, formerly of St. Thomas' Church, Sheffield. Its use dates to the late 1980s for the purpose of "identifying a missional [and discipleship] vehicle" in the life of St. Thomas; it is "a group of 20 to 50 people who exist in Christian community, to reach a particular neighborhood or network of relationships."⁵⁸ Similar to simple forms of church, these Missional Communities are designed to be "lightweight and low maintenance" so as to allow practices of time with God, time with one another building community, and time with those outside of relationship with Jesus. Breen says that the genius of the Missional Community is building on the DNA of an extended

⁵⁷ Roger Thoman, "House Church Basics – Part 1-A: What is Church?" SimpleChurch Journal, http://sojourner.typepad.com/house_church_blog/2004/02/_house_church_b.html (accessed January 19, 2011).

⁵⁸ Mike Breen, "Mike Breen: What is Missional Community?" <http://www.vergenetwork.org/2010/12/31/mike-breen-what-is-a-missional-community-printable/> (accessed January 19, 2011). St. Thomas' is an Anglican and Baptist mix of churches; see <http://sttoms.net/>.

family grouping bonded together to incarnate the Gospel in a specific cultural context.⁵⁹ Significantly, these communities also have a direct connection with an existing church, in this case, St. Thomas' Church, for accountability and resourcing.

Generically, Felicity Dale provides a definition of missional communities as "families of God's people, centered on Jesus, sharing life together, and intentionally reaching out with the Good News of the Kingdom."⁶⁰ Michael Frost articulates five "rules of order" for a missional community as Bless, Eat, Listen, Learn, and Sent.⁶¹ This definition has recently been taken up by the Anglican affiliated Church Mission Society in the Small Missional Communities initiative.⁶² These seem to bear much similarity to Frost and Hirsch's concept of *communitas*, a "Christian community inspired to overcome their instincts to 'huddle and cuddle' and to instead form themselves around a common mission that calls them onto a dangerous journey to unknown places."⁶³

In the Western world, compiling statistics on simple forms of church is difficult, because by their very nature they tend to be outside organized and institutional Church in numbers that do not seem significant or relevant as normally measured. However, a range of figures are available for the USA, UK and Europe. On the one side of the Atlantic,

⁵⁹ Mike Breen, "Mike Breen: What is Missional Community?"

⁶⁰ Felicity Dale, "Felicity Dale: What is Missional Community?" <http://www.vergenetwork.org/2011/01/02/felicity-dale-what-is-a-missional-community-printable/> (accessed January 19, 2011).

⁶¹ Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 150-52.

⁶² CMS, "Small Missional Communities," <http://www.cms-uk.org/Community/Smallmissionalcommunities/tabid/442/language/en-GB/Default.aspx> (accessed January 19, 2011). See also <http://kindling.cms-uk.org/group/smc> for Ian Adam's blog.

⁶³ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 221. See also Frost, *Exiles*, 123-29, 145.

George Barna estimates that there are between six and twelve million Americans involved in house churches.⁶⁴ He bases these findings from research asking different kinds of questions about the nature of people's religious experiences "independent of a congregational-form church." Barna also notes that when using the narrowest definition of house church involvement, about 5 percent of the adult population is engaged in house church in the United States.⁶⁵ Another survey in 2009 by the Pew Forum found that 9 percent of American Protestants only attended "home services."⁶⁶

In the UK and Europe, research results are more tentative than that done by Barna or the Pew Forum. Nevertheless, Alexander Campbell attempted an "informed 'guesstimate'" in his report to Mission21 in February 2006. Using information based on church "leavers" meeting in unstructured contexts, and research on several towns, cities, and rural areas, he says:

Our cautious estimates based on these approaches reveals that there could be around 40,000 people currently gathering in small, organic communities. Some observers are suggesting there could be far more than this. This number alone is not insignificant. However, what could be more significant is the number of these gatherings which contain the vision and DNA for multiplication and movement.⁶⁷

A more recent report similarly endeavors to make an informed guess for Europe, noting that most of these simple forms of church appear after the year 2000. Their cautious

⁶⁴ This is out of a population of some 307 million. U.S. Census Bureau, "Census Bureau: Texas Gains the Most in Population," <http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb09-199.html> (accessed November 29, 2010).

⁶⁵ The Barna Group, "How Many People Really Attend a House Church? Barna Study Finds it Depends on the Definition," <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/19-organic-church/291-how-many-people-really-attend-a-house-church-barna-study-finds-it-depends-on-the-definition> (accessed November 29, 2010).

⁶⁶ USA Today, "'House Churches' Keep Worship Small, Simple, Friendly," http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2010-07-22-housechurch21_ST_N.htm (accessed November 29, 2010).

⁶⁷ Campbell, *Mission 21: A Report on Church Planting in the UK Since 2000*, 39.

analysis arrives at a total of 11,300 simple church groups, 1,255 simple church networks, and 124,300 people across 45 (primarily European) nations.⁶⁸ While these figures are not definitive, they certainly indicate that activity in experimenting and being church outside traditional church boundaries is taking place across the Western world.

Again, what characterizes forms of emerging church as distinguished from most expressions of institutional Church is that the cultural, historical, and geographical context comes before the form of church and shapes the church which emerges. Put another way, as recently stated by Robinson, emerging church is but the "latest response of the Church to missional engagement with the culture in which the institutional Church once engaged."⁶⁹ The following chapter explores the unique aspects of the UK cultural context in more depth.

⁶⁸ Marc van der Woude, Steve Hill, and Jonathan Fokker, "Simple Church in Europe: Status Report 2010," SimpleChurch.eu, http://simplechurch.eu/images/uploads/Simple_Church_Europe_Status_Report_2010_Final_Version.pdf (accessed December 6, 2010), 18.

⁶⁹ Martin Robinson, conversation with author, Nottingham, UK, November 23, 2010.

CHAPTER 3

THE CULTURAL SHIFT FROM MODERNITY TO POST-MODERNITY

Harry Patch, the last British survivor with personal experience of the trenches of World War I died in 2009; he was 111 years old.¹ He experienced life in three centuries, during which change was far-reaching and increasingly accelerated. This chapter focuses on describing a phenomenon which became apparent during Patch's life: the cultural shift from modernity to post-modernity. First, it will briefly describe the shift between modernity and post-modernity, noting reservations about this shift. Next, it will highlight elements of both which bear on the planting of a simple church network. Afterwards, it will identify what the author considers are unique aspects of UK culture also relevant to consider. Finally, this chapter will conclude by stating why understanding this milieu matters for contextualized forms of mission, evangelism, and church.

Describing the Cultural Shift from Modernity to Post-Modernity

It is advisable that one proceed with a degree of caution to describe this cultural shift. This begins by acknowledging the dangers of oversimplifying a complex process or

¹ BBC News, "WWI Veteran Patch Dies Aged 111," <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8168691.stm> (accessed March 16, 2010).

speaking authoritatively about a cultural change process that is still underway and in which observers and writers are thoroughly enmeshed and therefore unable to be altogether objective. Nevertheless, while noting these possibilities, one cannot refrain from attempting to describe the terrain our Western culture has travelled that influences where our culture is now and will be in the future.

Perhaps it is best to start by noting that modernity and post-modernity are ways of looking at the world: "a worldview is what we think about the world when we are not really thinking."² That is, a worldview comprises a set of assumptions, often unquestioned, about how things are or ought to be. Anthropologist David Burnett points out four characteristics of a worldview which can be summarized as follows:

A worldview consists of the shared framework of ideas held by a particular society concerning how they perceive the world . . . , [and which] gives shape and order to the multitude of outward manifestations of a culture A second characteristic of worldview is that the ideas and values it embraces always seem logical and obvious to the people of the particular culture A third characteristic of worldview is that it attempts to show order and predictability within everyday experiences The fourth characteristic of worldview is that it is learned unconsciously early in life as the person acquires their culture.³

As Burnett notes, a worldview and one's culture are not the same. Culture is that "sum total of ways of living developed by a group of human beings handed on from generation to generation"; into this falls all those aspects of language, arts, technologies, beliefs, experiences and practices "that seek to grasp and express the ultimate nature of things."⁴

² Martin Robinson, *The Faith of the Unbeliever* (Cowborough, UK: Monarch, 1994), 33. Attributed to Lesslie Newbigin, but no reference is provided.

³ David Burnett, *Clash of Worlds* (London: Monarch, 2002), 13-21.

⁴ Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1986), 3.

In contrast, a worldview "acts both as a filter and as an organising principle" in which to make sense of one's culture.⁵

Historians, theologians, sociologists, philosophers, and others have recognized periods of time within Western culture during the last 2000 years that have a prevailing worldview. These have been identified with various labels and levels of specificity.⁶ For the purposes of this paper, a minimal referencing of these dominant ways of looking at the world will be used: modern and post-modern.⁷ Moreover, as John Finney writes, "If we are being accurate, it is 'post-modernism', not 'postmodernism'. In other words it merely describes the sort of thinking which has come after modernism – it is not a coherent philosophy of its own."⁸ These shifts from one predominant worldview to another are not so easy to pinpoint chronologically. As Martin Robinson notes, "Because they are so all-embracing, worldviews do not change very easily. They tend to be rather stable systems which only alter when it can be conclusively demonstrated over a significant period of time that they do not offer an explanation of reality that fits the information that is available to a particular culture."⁹ James Smith argues that in post-

⁵ Robinson, *The Faith of the Unbeliever*, 33.

⁶ For instance, Ancient History, Classical Antiquity, the Medieval period, Dark Ages, Middle Ages, and Enlightenment; other academic disciplines use their own distinct labels and descriptions too. For another alternative, see John Drane's use of Daniel Pink's taxonomy (Agricultural, Industrial, Informational, and Conceptual Ages): John William Drane, *After McDonaldization: Mission, Ministry, and Christian Discipleship in an Age of Uncertainty* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 16-28.

⁷ Heath White, *Postmodernism 101: A First Course for the Curious Christian* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 23ff. Technically-speaking, the suffix "ism" would be applied to describe the worldview, while the suffix "ity" would be the historical era. See White, *Postmodernism 101*, 11.

⁸ John Finney, *Emerging Evangelism* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2004), 36. Consequently, "post-modern," "post-modern," and "post-modernity" are used throughout these pages.

⁹ Robinson, *The Faith of the Unbeliever*, 33.

modernity (and, by extension, modernity), these changes started with concepts and ideas introduced by philosophers and other thinkers, which took time to trickle down to the common person and become evident in culture.¹⁰

Significantly, the transitions from one overarching worldview to another are neither seamless nor smooth, and are often accompanied by crisis and chaos. These shifts bring crisis because one's personal worldview can be called into question. They also bring chaos because these changes are discontinuous and uneven in the experiences of people in a society. That is, elements of one worldview are being retained or surrendered in a mixed fashion, while elements of a newer worldview are being adopted or rejected in a similar mixed fashion. There results a clash of worldviews within a culture over the course of multiple generations before a new overarching worldview can be identified.

It is generally acknowledged the rise of modernity can be identified in a period of time called the Enlightenment (sometimes called the Age of Reason). Newbigin describes it in this manner, saying, "It is clear that around the middle of the eighteenth century there was a profound and widely shared feeling among thinking people in western Europe that a new age had come, and that its essential nature was 'Enlightenment.' It was, in fact, a conviction that Europeans now knew the secret of knowledge and therefore the secret of mastery over the world."¹¹ While identifying the roots of Enlightenment thinking require some understanding of the prior philosophical contributions of thinkers such as Plato,

¹⁰ This trickle down concept is seen in James K. A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*, The Church and Postmodern Culture (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 20. R. Scott Smith articulates it as two levels of (postmodern) view, that is, a "street" level form and the "academic" form. See R. Scott Smith, *Truth and the New Kind of Christian: The Emerging Effects of Postmodernism in the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005), 17-19.

¹¹ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 23.

Aristotle, and Aquinas, and the empirical (or scientific) methods of the likes of Bacon, Galileo, and Newton, it is sufficient to note here that two streams of thought were essential to its development. Rationalism (the assertion that human reason can determine reality) and Empiricism (the application of the scientific method to determine reality) sought to answer the question, "How can we know and understand the world in which we live?" apart from knowing the ultimate purpose(s) for which the world (and people) exist.¹² Further contributions by thinkers such as Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, Darwin, Descartes, and Locke helped to shape enlightenment thinking into what has been called "modernism" by the end of the nineteenth century.¹³

Observers of Western culture in the latter portion of the 1900s began to notice hints of dissatisfaction with the version of reality that modernism offered; others voiced concerns that our contemporary culture was experiencing disorientation and reorientation in a transition "from one construction of reality to another."¹⁴ Some pointed to the philosophical influences of the French scholars Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault who challenged various aspects of modernity.¹⁵ Others called attention to the failed promises of unfettered progress and improvement which modernism claimed for humanity.¹⁶

Whatever the case, pinning the shift from modernity to something called "post-modernity" to specific historical events is probably a fruitless exercise, though some try

¹² Robinson, *The Faith of the Unbeliever*, 36-37, and Smith, *Truth and the New Kind of Christian*, 26-27.

¹³ White, *Postmodernism 101*, 30-33, and Robinson, *The Faith of the Unbeliever*, 40ff.

¹⁴ Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?* 17.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 21ff.

¹⁶ White, *Postmodernism 101*, 42.

to do so.¹⁷ It may even be futile to claim it "represents any sort of coherent worldview"¹⁸ and is more of a "movement in the history of ideas," a "reactionary movement" which "resists being categorized."¹⁹ What is common is a sense that things are falling apart:

"The Enlightenment" is a shorthand way of referring to the world view that has prevailed in the West for roughly the past 500 years, while "post-modernity" will serve as a way of describing the chaos into which things have descended once that world view began to be questioned and rejected Use of the term gives the appearance of rationality to discussions about contemporary culture, which no doubt explains why it has become so popular. But to paraphrase Marx's dictum, "post-modernity" is the opiate of the intelligentsia, a make believe expression that encourages academics to think they understand what is going on in the world – and behind that is the thought that if we are able to name it correctly, we will also be able to control it. This is just fantasy and wishful thinking.²⁰

Whatever else the "chaos" of post-modernity may be in juxtaposition with modernity, the "cultural phenomena" requires venturing forth into further description, but cautiously.²¹

Elements of Modernity and Post-Modernity

Plenty of resources are available which endeavor to outline the differences between modern and post-modern ways of looking at the world; more than enough to make the eyes glaze over in confusion. Many have crafted tables and charts attempting to simplify the task, but these are not altogether value-free in that they evidence to some

¹⁷ Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?* 19; J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than it Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (London: SPCK, 1995), 10ff.; and Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World: A Guide to Reaching Twenty-first-Century Listeners* (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity, 2001), 24-25.

¹⁸ John William Drane, *Do Christians Know How to be Spiritual? The Rise of New Spirituality and the Mission of the Church* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2005), 25.

¹⁹ Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 24. See also Robinson, *The Faith of the Unbeliever*, 24.

²⁰ Drane, *Do Christians Know How to be Spiritual?* 25.

²¹ Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?* 20-21.

degree the creator's view as to whether post-modernity is perceived as a threat or not to institutional, orthodox, or evangelical Christianity. This section will therefore be limited to highlighting those elements deemed relevant to note from the historical and cultural context which are background to planting the third place network. These observations will be stated as "tensions" insofar as clear distinctions and transitions from one to the other worldview cannot be authoritatively pronounced.²² Moreover, there is overlap between these, which are as follows: the tension between religion and spirituality, the tension between individualism and community, and the tension between Story and stories.

The Tension between Religion and Spirituality

Essentially, this tension is about a transition in the nature of the quest for meaning in the contemporary age of Western culture, and a change in the sources and resources (and authority) for clarifying one's place in the universe. As a holdover from the premodern era, it was taken for granted in the modern Western paradigm that one would be born into a society that was predominantly "Christian." Religious expression in the form of worship took place in authorized facilities dedicated to that purpose and led by institutional authorities in a manner approved by the institution. Notwithstanding notable individuals who tested the religious and political authorities to varying extents (Luther, Tyndale, Wycliffe, the Moravians, and the Anabaptists, for example), the practice of trusting or acquiescing to these institutions remained a feature of the modern era. With the rise of the empirical and rational features of the modern era, the scientific method was

²² "Tension" is being used in two ways. One sense of it refers to a kind of polarizing action one primary influence or characteristic or view has over against the other. A second sense has to do with a feeling of uncertainty about the outcome these competing forces will take society and oneself.

increasingly applied to Christian theology, the Bible, and the organization of the Church.²³ Theology was systematized and categorized by theologians much like biologists would develop nomenclature for plants and animals. Likewise, critical methods of examining the biblical texts were developed similar to those applied to other historical and literary works; whatever in the texts did not sound "reasonable" was tossed out – miracles and the divine among them.²⁴ Organizationally, modern ideas were adopted for collecting statistics, setting objectives, marketing the local church, appointing leaders, and establishing goals which are "certainly an imitation of the pattern of secular business practice."²⁵

In this mix, evangelism and mission was from the Western world to everywhere else, and equated the civilizing of foreign societies with the imposition of Western culture and values which included "Christianizing" them. Apologetics focused on articulating truth as propositions which required mental assent. Within Western culture, maximizing church growth came by efficient marketing methods and "tweaking" existing structures and programs. The delivery of truth also became a monological transfer of knowledge, equating religious maturity (discipleship) with the intellectual grasp of the truth propositions of Christian theology.

²³ The scientific method is simply the practice of creating a hypothesis (statement to be proved) and testing that hypothesis using the five senses to measure its accuracy and validity. Based on the results, either a new hypothesis is formulated for testing, or further testing is undertaken until, at a certain point, the hypothesis is considered "proved."

²⁴ John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *God is Back: How the Global Revival of Faith is Changing the World* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), 41-42.

²⁵ Finney, *Emerging Evangelism*, 42. Phyllis Tickle makes the observation that during these kinds of grand transitions, "The Church has always been sucked along in the same ideational currents as has the culture in general." While she reflects more on this in terms of church governance, her comments seem to apply here as well. Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 151. See also Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism*, 235, 241-42.

In acquiescing to the prevailing culture, a sense of mystery and humility was lost.²⁶ A new kind of arrogance and packaging of the Gospel has manifested such that Christians themselves have become their own negative polemic against the gospel. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons note from their recent research in the American context that "outsiders" (their word for people not attached to or following Jesus) have an "extraordinarily negative" view of "born-again" Christians and evangelicals.²⁷ They quote one outsider from Mississippi typifying this view who says: "Christianity has become bloated with blind followers who would rather repeat slogans than actually feel true compassion and care. Christianity has become marketed and streamlined into a juggernaut of fearmongering that has lost its own heart."²⁸

The modern and post-modern mix of institutionalism and distrust of institutions (and Christianity and the Church in particular) has contributed to a view over the last several decades welcoming the language of "spirituality" over against the language of "religion." John Drane puts it this way:

It is often observed that, for increasing numbers of people today, there is a clear distinction to be drawn between "spirituality" and "religion", certainly in the cultures of Britain and North America. The terminology may be slightly different in other parts of Europe, but the reality of the same distinction made is still to be found there. On this understanding, "spirituality" is generally seen as something life-giving, holistic, enriching and open-ended, while "religion" is characterized by the opposite qualities, being perceived as oppressive, exploitative and hierarchical, quite probably because it is seen as male-dominated.²⁹

²⁶ Finney, *Emerging Evangelism*, 28-31, 42-43.

²⁷ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity . . . and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 25.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁹ John William Drane, *CMS Annual Sermon 2001: Unknown Gods, Declining Churches, and the Spiritual Search of Contemporary Culture* (London: CMS, 2001), 4-5.

Elsewhere, Drane notes general factors that explain this "move from 'religion' to 'spirituality' in relation to the experiences of everyday life."³⁰ These he lists as: life expectancy (we are now living longer), freedom and happiness (we can no longer take it for granted that material prosperity equates to happiness), personal openness (in revealing our personal lives), fear (things are in a bigger mess than we thought), and diversity (we know more of the world than previous generations).³¹

Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead make a similar comment regarding the language change: "Survey after survey shows that increasing numbers of people now prefer to call themselves 'spiritual' rather than 'religious.'"³² Their recent empirical study exploring church life and holistic practices in the town of Kendal,³³ while concluding that there is no "revolutionary" change in a turn from the practice of religion as it has been known (traditional Christian congregational life) to alternative spiritualities or "New Spirituality," a change is nevertheless well underway and building momentum for a revolution in some 30 years.³⁴ Other studies similarly conclude that there is an increasing interest in spirituality and spiritual awareness. David Hay and Kate Hunt's "research

³⁰ Drane, *Do Christians Know How to be Spiritual?* 19.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 19-22.

³² Paul Heelas, Linda Woodhead and others, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality*, ed. Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *Religion and Spirituality in the Modern World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 1.

³³ Holistic practices refers to those activities as wide and varied as yoga, reiki, Tai Chi, feng shui, Buddhism, complementary and alternative medicines and therapies such as homeopathy and acupuncture, astrology, and a myriad of Eastern religious and New Age concepts and the availability and use of materials to exercise these practices. See Heelas, Woodhead and others, *The Spiritual Revolution*, 25ff.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2, 48. Heelas et al are testing the "massive subjective turn of modern culture," defined as a change from "life lived in terms of external 'objective' roles, duties and obligations" characteristic of modern religious life to "life lived by reference to one's own subjective experiences (relational as much as individualistic)." They also argue that this shift is taking place within the congregational life of the western Church. See 67, especially their discussion in chapter three: "Evidence for a Spiritual Revolution," 49-76.

conversations" at the turn of the new millennium showed that listening to people who "for one reason or another, keep clear of the institutional church" provided opportunity to hear expressions of spiritual experiences and their own understanding of spirituality.³⁵ Coventry Diocese's "Beyond the Fringe" research project in 2003 echoed these findings.³⁶

The Tension between Individualism and Community

A tension between individualism and community also appears in the transition from modernity to post-modernity. This is not simply to say individualism is a primary characteristic of modernity or community is a primary characteristic of post-modernity, and therein resides the tension as they rub against each other. It is more complex than that. Individualism is the view that a person is the exclusive locus of decision-making without reference to other individuals, collectively or individually. Stanley Grenz remarks that "One of the hallmarks of modernity is the elevation of the individual. The modern world is an individualistic world, a realm of the autonomous human person endowed with inherent rights."³⁷ Furthermore, it is a world which brought the creation of secular space, introducing a split between the secular and the sacred.³⁸

³⁵ David Hay and Kay Hunt, "Understanding the Spirituality of People Who Don't Go To Church: A Report on the Findings of the Adults' Spirituality Project at the University of Nottingham" (London: Mission Theological Advisory Group, 2000), http://www.spiritualjourneys.org.uk/pdf/look_understanding_the_spirituality_of_people.pdf (accessed August 17, 2010), 9, 12.

³⁶ See Nick Spencer, *Beyond the Fringe: Researching a Spiritual Age* (Hope Valley, UK: Cliff College Publishing, 2005), and Steven Croft, Rob Frost and others, *Evangelism in a Spiritual Age: Communicating Faith in a Changing Culture*, Exploration (London: CHP, 2005), especially chapters two and three by Spencer that describes the research and results, and chapters six and seven by Frost and Croft which consider contemporary expressions of spirituality and ways the Church can respond.

³⁷ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 167.

³⁸ The "secularization thesis" insists that the decline of the sacred is inevitable, but is increasingly seen as untenable; see Colin J. Greene and Martin D. Robinson, *Metavista: Bible, Church and Mission in an Age of Imagination*, Faith in an Emerging Culture (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), 153-67.

One result was a spiral of surrender by the community (i.e., the Church) of discourse in the public sphere about faith and living out the Gospel to a privatized and individualistic piety irrelevant to the "real" world.³⁹ What is more, with the rise of the individual as a consumer of all things, including religious beliefs, then it can be seen that "the privatized pluralism of the religious supermarket is not really saying all faiths are equally true, so much as they are all equally untrue and therefore it doesn't really matter which one you choose."⁴⁰ In this, truth is found as an objective reality apart from religious belief. Couple this with a growing suspicion of authority structures and "truth" as these institutions claim to steward, and a kind of rugged or "radical individualism" presents itself in this tension.⁴¹

In contrast, some observers see a shift from this hyper-individualism towards a greater desire for community and accompanying experiential values of authenticity and vulnerability. Heelas and Woodhead describe this sense of "relationality" from their research in Kendal as a search for subjective well-being which individuals recognize they cannot experience without reference to and practice with others.⁴² James Smith finds

³⁹ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Other Side of 1984: Questions for the Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1986), 22-23. Given space, this would be a place to discuss Berger's concept of plausibility structures.

⁴⁰ Robinson, *The Faith of the Unbeliever*, 46. Compare also Drane, *Do Christians Know How to be Spiritual?* 35-40, where the author notes the commercialization of New Spirituality as an individualistic enterprise, and Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967), 138.

⁴¹ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 80, notes that Kant's philosophy helped support the shift to "radical individualism." He writes that Kant "believed that the burden of discovering truth is ultimately a private matter, that the knowing process is fundamentally a relationship between the autonomous knowing self and the world waiting to be known through the creative power of the active mind."

⁴² Heelas, Woodhead and others, *The Spiritual Revolution*, 98ff., 124-25. The authors also argue that failure of congregational life in Kendal to seek this communal well-being is one reason for church decline in Kendal.

origins in this new emphasis in philosophical thought about the important role of community in interpreting reality for meaning and identity.⁴³ McLaren likewise says, "Knowing is not an individual matter, it is a group experience,"⁴⁴ while R. Scott Smith puts it like this: "No longer is it the case that we *individually* cannot know things in themselves, or as they really are, but only as they appear to each of us. Instead, we (*together*, in community, and not privately) cannot know reality as it truly is, *but only as we talk about it in our respective communities*."⁴⁵

There is more to it than this, of course. While there are those who still champion the individual's struggle to find identity and meaning and triumph through tragedy and adversity apart from community, there is the alternate view that asks, "Why would I want to face these on my own?" Groups of like-minded people, assuming a role dysfunctional family systems cannot, "insist that we do not need to face the discontinuities of life alone."⁴⁶ All the same, facing these realities with others, in the contemporary scene, has increasingly devolved into a kind of group consumerism: "At this time in late modernity, communal bonding occurs when individuals consume goods alongside one another. It is at the shopping mall where this connecting occurs, as shoppers buy similar products and share 'fellowship.' Many American churches function similarly."⁴⁷

⁴³ Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?* 51-53.

⁴⁴ Brian D. McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 163.

⁴⁵ Smith, *Truth and the New Kind of Christian*, 30-31; emphasis is in the original.

⁴⁶ John William Drane, *The McDonaldization of the Church: Consumer Culture and the Church's Future* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys Pub., 2001), 160-61.

⁴⁷ Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 92.

The Tension between Story and Stories

The tension between "Story" and "stories" is often located by philosophical commentators in a statement by Jean-Francois Lyotard defining post-modernism:

"Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives."⁴⁸

Popularly (mis)understood, this has been taken to mean by some that the error of the post-modern age is a rejection of the overarching redemptive story of the Gospel. Rather, as James Smith explains, it instead refers to the modern era's claim for legitimation. He writes, "It is precisely here that we locate postmodernity's incredulity toward metanarratives: they are just another language game, albeit masquerading as the game above all games. Or as Lyotard puts it, scientific knowledge, which considered itself to be a triumph over narrative knowledge covertly grounds itself in a narrative (i.e., an originary myth)."⁴⁹

In this understanding, post-moderns have come to distrust modernity's claims to be objective about truth, and the Story of modernity itself is suspect. But for many post-moderns, the Story that modernity sought to displace (Christendom) is also suspect. The tension this brings is well expressed by a recent marketing textbook:

For the first time in human history, a shared mythos has broken down, and commercial messages are now taking the place of shared sacred stories. We know in our hearts that a profession designed to sell products cannot fill this gap. If we take the time to think of how many people are finding the only meaning they have

⁴⁸ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Theory and History of Literature 10 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv. "Story" is hereafter another shorthand way of referring to "metanarratives" or the big, overarching story seeking to embrace and explain reality. It comes from this quote by Lyotard where the French *grand récit* is used. See Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?* 63. The term "stories" refers to the plethora of narratives found not just in literature, media, theatre, and the arts, but in the countless interactions between people.

⁴⁹ Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?* 67; see his entire discussion 62-70.

in their lives from consumption of various sorts, we do not feel proud; we feel sad, even outraged.⁵⁰

However, this does not mean that post-modern people have given up on finding or having a grand narrative which consumerism fails to meaningfully provide. It is precisely the vacuousness of consumption and the "McDonaldization" of Church which many react against: "Indeed, the very thing that makes New Age [or New Spirituality] so popular is not that it has no metanarrative, but that it offers a different one than that which the West has traditionally embraced."⁵¹

Indispensible to the Story, whatever it may be, are the stories; that is, the almost infinite collection of personal experiences, knowledge, and discovery which are endlessly and creatively told and retold. These stories either undergird the commonly accepted Story (again, whatever it may be) or actually buttress another contrary Story. If it is true that post-moderns value authenticity and vulnerability, then telling these stories, sharing an experience and re-telling that shared experience as a shared story, can create communal bonds under a more comprehensive Story. The Christian Story as found in the Bible, one might say, is, after all, a collection of stories of people telling and trying to make sense of their experiences with God. If it is true that post-modernity is "the collapse of metanarratives because of the impossibility of getting outside such assumptions to prove them on a rational, foundationalist, and objective method that enables us to construct from the bottom up universal knowledge," then, once again, it is about

⁵⁰ Margaret Mark and Carol S. Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw: Harnessing the Power of Archetypes to Create a Winning Brand* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 359. Cited by Robinson and Smith, *Invading Secular Space*, 211.

⁵¹ Drane, *McDonaldization*, 36-37, 134. See 133-54 for a full discussion on metanarratives and story-telling.

exercising faith and trust in everyday life; it is Augustine's "faith seeking understanding," not the other way around.⁵²

General and Unique Cultural Characteristics of Post-Modernity in England

There are two other relevant features to describe that distinctly, if subtly, flavor the taste of post-modernity as it appears in England as compared to the remainder of the Western world. The first has to do with the new post-Christendom reality which now exists in the UK. The second has to do with what makes English people "English," though what defines one as "English" in recent years is changing. Combined, these have to be taken into account in considering the cultural and historical context.

Stuart Murray provides a useful definition for the discussion that highlights the transition to post-Christendom: "Post-Christendom is the culture that emerges as the Christian faith loses coherence within a society that has been definitively shaped by the Christian story and as the institutions that have been developed to express Christian convictions decline in influence."⁵³ Western Europe has primarily known Christendom as the prevailing model of relationship between Church and State. This has also been true in Canada and the USA, though differentiated as "functional Christendom" by one observer because while the legal structures do not exist in the same fashion, "the legacy continues as a pattern of powerful traditions, attitudes and social structures."⁵⁴ Post-Christendom,

⁵² Scot McKnight, "What is the Emerging Church?" http://www.andyrowell.net/andy_rowell/files/scot_mcknight_what_is_the_emerging_church.pdf (accessed January 17, 2011), 11.

⁵³ Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 6.

⁵⁴ Darrell L. Guder, "Missional Church: From Sending to Being Sent," in *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1998), 6.

then, describes the new emerging culture where the telling of the Christian story is reduced to an echo and the institutions expressing that story are shadows of what they once were.

What this describes is no less than a paradigm shift, and a paradigm shift that is not yet being seen in the United States as a whole, argues Murray.⁵⁵ Moreover, this paradigm shift, says Murray, is of a kind of change that puts it in an altogether different category than post-modern developments or descriptions, because, as Colin Greene and Martin Robinson have expressed it: "Christendom has become terminally implausible."⁵⁶ In this view, Christendom as a structure (and a kind of structure unique to Western culture) is not just collapsing, its concrete foundation has become quicksand.⁵⁷

Further, maintains Murray, this shift from Christendom to post-Christendom can be spoken of with much more confidence than that of the shift from modernity to post-modernity, and is of a different nature to that of non-Western cultures.⁵⁸ Murray writes, "The demise of Christendom in Western culture is the first instance of such a cultural shift occurring without the pressure of persecution or the adoption of a different story. Here the Christian story has not been replaced by another story but by skepticism about all explanatory and culture-shaping stories."⁵⁹ Murray (and others) make the additional claim that the post-Christendom of England differs from that of America in "form, status,

⁵⁵ Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 17. That is, there are regional differences in the rate and progress of this transition to post-Christendom.

⁵⁶ Greene and Robinson, *Metavista*, 70.

⁵⁷ Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 14.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 12. He also observes that post-modernity may only be a reaction or critique of modernity.

⁵⁹ Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 19-20.

and experience," even if the "language and issues are recognizable," though he does not outline what these differences are.⁶⁰ Greene and Robinson, for their part, put forth Berger's proposals that the USA's Christian establishment serves as a medium of passing on an "optimistic ideology."⁶¹ This ideology, with its various characteristics, and using American Christendom as a supportive communication mechanism, explains (functional) Christendom's persistence in the American context.⁶² David Olson, in his brief review of this changing cultural context and the implications for ministry, avoids debating these points to simply make the observation that the passing of Christendom (and the stages of its demise) to post-Christendom has been delayed by a generation in the USA as compared to Europe. Olson does not provide any support for this time frame, but as a generalization, the fact of a delay can be acknowledged.⁶³

The other feature to consider has to do with the intersection between the English sense of identity and this new post-Christendom world. This is not a straightforward task to describe accurately and there is a risk of over-generalizing. On the one hand, there has

⁶⁰ Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 17. Other discussions of some of these differences can be found in Micklethwait and Wooldridge, *God is Back*, 55ff., and Craig Van Gelder, "Missional Context: Understanding North American Culture," in *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1998), 32-34.

⁶¹ Peter L. Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies: Christian Commitment and the Religious Establishment in America* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1961), 13. From Greene and Robinson, *Metavista*, 71. This "optimistic ideology" appears in forms such as "Manifest Destiny" or "Chosen Nation." All have a sense that somehow America has a special, God-given role in human history. Recently, this has been coined as "American Exceptionalism," a view that because of her God-given role, America can do things (ethically, legally, and morally) other nations cannot. See Brian D. McLaren, "On American Exceptionalism," <http://brianmclaren.net/archives/blog/on-american-exceptionalism.html> (accessed December 8, 2010).

⁶² See their complete discussion, Greene and Robinson, *Metavista*, 66-74. Micklethwait and Wooldridge, *God is Back*, 55, also opine that "religion and modernity have never been enemies in America in the way they have in Europe. On the contrary, they were fraternal twins that grew up together."

⁶³ David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 164-9 (footnote 5); Murray makes a similar observation in reference to the delay in *Post-Christendom*, 17.

been this idiosyncratic "privacy" feature of English culture; on the other a secularizing process which has labeled religion (and Christianity in particular) as illegitimate in the public domain.⁶⁴ In combination, this has historically made everyday conversations about the Christian narrative quite difficult to engender in a relaxed and ongoing fashion that is neither forced nor artificial or in any sense contrived. Certainly, in the political realm, "Explicit mention of religion is seen as 'un-British,' a bit 'American' and a 'turn-off' to the electorate."⁶⁵ In the inter-personal realm, as well, for many British people, discussions of personal faith in Jesus are as good as a "no-go" area of conversation.⁶⁶

There is also a mixture of self-perception and reality regarding what it means to be English (that is, primarily and historically White English). To elaborate, as one writer has asserted, the English identity can be described as a "fragile mixture of decency, fairness, humour – and grievance." Melanie Reid goes on to describe what she means.

For me, Englishness resides in character, not anything physical. It is an indefinable stew of tolerance, decency, resourcefulness and humour that only manifests itself when called upon. Englishness means being determinedly unshowy; modest to the point, often, of crashing dullness. Englishness means possessing a deep sense of fairness, usually completely unarticulated, and a prize-

⁶⁴ In function, this does not appear to substantially differ much from the American "Separation of Church (or religion) and State," except that what was once intended as a measure to prevent government interference of religious practice has under the rise of secularization become a way to marginalize the contribution and place of religious or Christian input in public discourse.

⁶⁵ Justin Parkinson, "Will Christians Swing the Election?" BBC News, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/election_2010/8607964.stm (accessed April 22, 2010).

⁶⁶ For examples and discussion of the challenge posed by this intersection of the English sense of privacy and the marginalizing effects of secularization in Britain, see Roger B. Edrington, *Everyday Men: Living in a Climate of Unbelief*, Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity 46 (Frankfurt: Verlag Peter Lang, 1987), 75ff., and Robinson, *The Faith of the Unbeliever*, 74ff. This recent reluctance to reveal one's internal ponderings and convictions stands in stark contrast to the amazing access church and parachurch organizations had to the British working-class in the 1800s, as described by Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 44-47.

winning ability for a good moan. Englishness may be vulgar . . . but on the whole it would rather do you a good turn than a bad.⁶⁷

This speaks to what many Americans call the British "reserve," a kind of hesitation or even self-doubt about putting oneself forward or engaging in socially-risky situations: "Who wants to put their head above the parapet and talk about something besides the weather?" Kate Fox describes this central core of Englishness as "social dis-ease," a kind of "congenital disorder, bordering on a sort of sub-clinical combination of autism and agoraphobia" and a kind of "discomfort and incompetence in the field (minefield) of social interaction."⁶⁸ She explains that "When we feel uncomfortable in social situations (that is, most of the time) we either become overpolite, buttoned up and awkwardly restrained or loud, loutish, crude, violent, and generally obnoxious. Both our famous "English reserve" and our infamous "English hooliganism" are symptoms of this social dis-ease, as is our obsession with privacy."⁶⁹

And yet, this mixture of self-perception and reality about what it means to be English is undergoing significant change and re-definition, asserts Cole Moreton. His recent book *Is God Still an Englishman?* is a social commentary on the events of the last thirty years, reflecting on what it means to be English (and by extension, how God has been fashioned in a form that supports a certain view of what it means to be English). In

⁶⁷ Melanie Reid, "Englishness Needs More Than a Corny Festival," *The Times* (April 19, 2010), http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/melanie_reid/article6360560.ece (accessed May 26, 2010). This penchant for "a good moan" has recently been taken up with a weekly Wednesday afternoon Radio Five phone-in. See "Richard Bacon's Moan In" at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00d7lql>.

⁶⁸ Kate Fox, *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2004), 401.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 401-2.

it, he makes the case that while many of Fox's observations ring true,⁷⁰ they are also about the ways many English want to perceive themselves, which in application in real life are untrue, "fair play" in reference to immigration and ethnic minorities being one of them.⁷¹ He goes on to say that "England *is* a memory, if you mean the old England with one culture and one faith."⁷² The greater reality, Moreton insists, is that England has always been a "rainbow" nation of multiple ethnicities, largely ghettoized, yes, but denial of this is no longer an option given recent immigration and the rising percentages of children coming from ethnic minorities and of mixed race.⁷³

Why it Matters – The Importance of Contextualization

In the introductory chapter of their book, *Emerging Churches*, Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger list eleven reasons why the Western church should study culture. They conclude the chapter with a call for Western Christians to be trained as missionaries to their own cultures.⁷⁴ They are, of course, just two of many who have done so since Lesslie Newbigin's insights, upon returning to England from missionary service in India, and articulated in *The Other Side of 1984*, that "Western Christians [ought] to recognize that they live in an alien culture and [need] to develop a truly missionary approach."⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Cole Moreton, *Is God Still an Englishman? How We Lost Our Faith (But Found New Soul)* (London: Little, Brown, 2010), 25-27, 298-9, 361.

⁷¹ Ibid., 49.

⁷² Ibid., 90.

⁷³ Ibid., 289-91.

⁷⁴ Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 15-26.

⁷⁵ Tim Stafford, "God's Missionary to Us, Part 1," *Christianity Today* (December 9, 1996), http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/article_print.html?id=581 (accessed March 11, 2010).

The history of missiological thinking has seen a number of terms proposed regarding what it means to communicate the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and experience authentic Christian living and discipleship within a culture.⁷⁶ Perhaps the best descriptive term which informs such an ambition is known as "contextualization." Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch offer the view that it is a "dynamic process whereby the constant message of the gospel interacts with specific, relative human situations" and where the gospel both "meets peoples' deepest needs and penetrates their worldviews" without extracting new followers of Jesus from their culture into an alien culture.⁷⁷ Charles Taber, a missiologist applying this thinking within the American context to Church Growth theory, gets at its core: "What all true contextualists have in common is the attempt to take the concrete human context in all its dimensions with utmost seriousness. The *particularity* of each milieu becomes the starting point for both the questions and the answers which will shape the evangelistic process and its aftermath in the life of the new church."⁷⁸

Not only that, it is to be seen that God is already at work in a given culture, and the incarnation is indispensable as a model of what this contextualization means in practice. And so, Taber writes, "It suggests that in important ways the gospel *answer* to

⁷⁶ Among them are words such as acculturation, cross-cultural, identification, indigenization, incarnation, enculturation, receptivity, accommodation, and syncretism, to name but a few.

⁷⁷ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 83. Frost and Hirsch in the same discussion locate the first attempt to wrestle with a definition in a 1972 World Council of Churches document called *Ministry in Context*. A few pages later they describe Charles Kraft's and Paul Hiebert's observations about contextualization which is worth reading. Church of England General Synod, *mission-shaped church*, 90, notes that the term "inculturation" tends to be used by Roman Catholic thinkers rather than "contextualization."

⁷⁸ Charles R. Taber, "Contextualization," in *Exploring Church Growth*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1983), 119; emphasis is in the original.

the human predicament will be found within the context rather than outside. This is not to say that everything necessary for salvation is already present; but it is to say that God did not arrive for the first time when foreign missionaries came on the scene."⁷⁹ He goes on to say,

A full blown contextual model is best constructed on the example of the incarnation. This represents at its core the fact that God took the human context in its irreducible particularity with utmost seriousness. Jesus did not begin his official ministry until he was thoroughly inside the lower-middle-class, artisanal, Galilean, pious context of first-century Judaism. The essence of the incarnation was to work for radical transformation from *within*; as such, it could be and was profoundly subversive without being in the least alien or imperialistic.⁸⁰

There are two challenges to this consideration of the incarnation and contextualization which immediately surface and are relevant to planting the third place network. First, few have the capacity to infiltrate another culture and exercise the patience, intentionality, and sacrifice Jesus demonstrated in thirty years of life even before his three years of public ministry leading to the cross.⁸¹ Even then, however, Jesus relied on His Father for direction and discernment: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can only do what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does" (John 5:44, NIV).⁸² This requires a deep humility before God and a deep reliance upon God for anyone entering another culture.

⁷⁹ Taber, "Contextualization," 120; emphasis is in the original.

⁸⁰ Ibid. The emphasis is in the original.

⁸¹ "A sound missiology will recognize that not any and every missionary can work in all contexts, so it will decide contextually what kinds of missionaries ought to carry the gospel to each human group." Ibid., 128.

⁸² All subsequent references to the New International Version (NIV) are from the 1984 version.

Second, contextualization requires localized knowledge and wisdom, and disciplined practice and intentionality in bringing the gospel in grace and truth in the same measure as Jesus.⁸³ It begs the question: "Can one ever become an insider to a culture without being of that culture and being a student of one's own culture?" This brings to mind Paul Watson's observation from his experience with church planting movements. Recently he noted that there is "lots of talk about contextualization in the American church, but much of it is arrogant because people do not know enough of their own culture to do that."⁸⁴ He adds that "obedience [to Jesus] by local people brings contextualization; the best an outsider can do is de-culturalize [their own understanding of the Gospel]."⁸⁵ Effectively, this means that planting expressions of the third place in communities other than one's own culture (be it ethnic, generational, or affinity group) will require a cultural insider. This will be something to consider more fully, particularly in implementation and strategy.

These first three chapters of this paper have sought to outline an understanding of the cultural and historical context in which the third place network church planting strategy is proposed, in order to inform and shape the strategy. Having done so,

⁸³ John 1:14, 17; "Contextualization is when the gospel presented and the response called for, offends for the right reasons and not for the wrong ones." Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 83.

⁸⁴ Paul Watson, "Making Disciples that become Movements" (Skype internet training, August 14, 2010). All future citations of the internet training refer to this date, unless otherwise noted.

⁸⁵ David Watson, Paul Watson, and Pat Robertson, "Church Planting Movements Training Conference" (training lecture at Pilgrim Hall Conference Centre, Easons Green, East Sussex, England, October 4-7, 2010). R. Daniel Shaw put it this way: "Instead of outsiders reconfiguring local cultural forms to fit the shape of Christianity with which they are familiar, we need—following the theological implications of the incarnation—to allow people to contemplate the implications of God-in-their-midst." R. Daniel Shaw, "Beyond Contextualization: Toward a Twenty-first-Century Model for Enabling Mission," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 34, no. 4 (October 2010): 211.

sufficiently one hopes, two impressions come to the fore. First, the strategic approach to planting the thirdplace network must confidently and appropriately navigate the tensions of post-modernity and post-Christendom in the form presented in an English culture that is not as "English" as it once was, and is increasingly multi-ethnic, even if that multi-ethnicity is not as great locally as in other areas of the region. Second, contextualization of the approach will require the work of insider leaders who understand their post-modern and post-Christendom culture, and the particularity of their own more localized culture.

These are turbulent times for Jesus' bride, the Church, in England. While the thirdplace experimental strategy described later most likely places it outside the boundaries of institutional Church, it is not intended as a slight to the institutional Church. As Phyllis Tickle observes from reviewing previous encounters of the Church with significant cultural change, "when an overly institutionalized form of Christianity is, or ever has been, battered into pieces and opened to the air of the world around it, that faith-form has both itself spread and also enabled the spread of the young upstart that afflicted it."⁸⁶ One fervently hopes that both will prove faithful and fruitful beyond human imagination. Before the thirdplace experimental strategy can be described, however, appropriate biblical and theological exploration must be undertaken which will inform that strategy. That is the focus of Part Two which follows.

⁸⁶ Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 28.

PART TWO

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION AND ASSUMPTIONS

CHAPTER 4

MAKING DISCIPLES AND PLANTING CHURCHES

It is now time to consider biblical and theological underpinnings of the third place strategy and experience to date. The current chapter outlines fundamental assumptions behind recent experimentation and future strategy. It begins by looking at the relationship between making disciples and church planting by examining mission and evangelism from a biblical perspective. It then explores definitions of church which are biblically informed by Jesus' incarnational expression of the Kingdom of God, in order to arrive at a personal working definition of church. Following this, basic elements of discipleship, leadership development and prayer are examined which are foundational to realizing the hope that the third place network will contribute to a church planting movement.

Mission and Evangelism in Biblical Perspective

The Bible retains an indispensable role for being shaped into the life and character of the Master. As the biblical writers describe their individual and corporate experience of God, a "grand and compelling story" emerges "that changes lives and societies."¹ It is a

¹ Kurt Norman Fredrickson, "An Ecclesial Ecology for Denominational Futures: Nurturing Organic Structures for Missional Engagement" (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2009), 162.

story of God as Trinity who, as a loving heavenly Father, reveals himself in Jesus Christ to people for redemption and restoration to himself and to one another, and gifts these same people with himself in the Holy Spirit for these very same purposes. This shaping of people and the community into the character and life of Jesus is, of course, primarily a New Testament concern,² but for the Church it flows from Israel's experience recorded in the Old Testament on into the New Testament.³

The biblical story calls for the ongoing transformation of those who carry the message as much as for the transformation of those to whom it is being carried. Newbigin reminds the Church that the introduction of the Bible into a receptor community does not just raise questions about the culture into which it is being introduced, but also about the "'Christianity' of the missionary." That is, the Bible operates "as an independent source of criticism directed both against the Christianity of the missionaries and against the traditional culture of the tribe."⁴ This experience with the God of the Bible, through the Bible, has been central to the Church's formation, ongoing life, and self-understanding since Peter first explained the events of what became known as Pentecost in Acts 2:14ff.⁵

Theologically, *missio Dei* describes the fundamental principle that it is the Triune God who initiates a call to restoration, it is God who enfleshed this message in Jesus, and

² It is outside this paper's scope to explore views of inspiration and the nature of the authority of the Bible for the Church. Further discussion can be found in Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 12ff., 81ff.

³ Frederickson explores "exile" and "marginality" as two themes which link the history of Israel and the Church as a "messianic people of God." Frederickson, "An Ecclesial Ecology," 67, 93ff. See also George A. Lindbeck, *The Church in a Postliberal Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

⁴ Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 146-47.

⁵ Granted, of course, that the Hebrew Bible was the initial repository of divine wisdom for the Church (see, for instance, 2 Tim. 3:16-17) before the formation of the New Testament canon.

it is God who by the Holy Spirit sustains and empowers the Church in testifying to that call for restoration to all peoples everywhere, expecting the Church's faithful response in this task. As Newbigin writes, "The mission of the church is in fact the church's obedient participation in that action of the Spirit by which the confession of Jesus as Lord becomes the authentic confession of every new people, each in its own tongue."⁶ This description of "mission as an activity of God himself" dates in embryonic form to a 1932 missionary conference paper written by Karl Barth, which then found clearer expression at another similar conference in 1952.⁷ Bosch locates this mission activity in God's character and nature, and then says, "The classical doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and Son sending the Holy Spirit is expanded to include yet another 'movement': Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world."⁸ Significantly, and as a reversal of the Christendom understanding, it is not the Church that has a mission; it is God on mission who has a Church.⁹

Numerous biblical texts illustrate or demonstrate the missional character of God. Among the more notable Old Testament passages include the call of Abraham – "I bless you to be a blessing to everyone on earth" (Gen. 12:1ff.); the call of Moses – "I have seen the suffering of my people and want to rescue them" (Ex. 3:1ff.); and the call of Jonah – "Go to Ninevah and preach judgment; yet I choose to relent because of their repentance"

⁶ Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 20.

⁷ David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology series (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 389-90.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 390.

⁹ For an original variant form of this, see Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 64.

(Jonah 1:1, 3:10, 4:11). In the New Testament, the missional character of God finds its pre-eminent expression in the person of Jesus. Jesus modeled faithful reliance on the Father, saying, "I obey my Father, so that everyone in the world might know that I love him" (John 14:31). He looked upon the multitudes with compassion as "sheep without a shepherd" (Mark 6:34, NIV) and "came to look for and to save people who are lost" (Luke 19:10).¹⁰ The first disciples were called "apostles" (ἀπόστολοι) (not because they occupied an office, but because they were similarly sent (ἀπέστεilen; Luke 9:2) to testify "that all people of every nation must be told in my name to turn to God" (Luke 24:47).¹¹

What is important here is not so much "reflecting on isolated 'missionary texts,'" but on the Bible as a whole which expresses "the missionary self-understanding and involvement of the people who gave birth to it."¹² This self-understanding expresses the tension that mission is both a divine and a human activity: God moves on humanity's behalf for reconciliation in Jesus out of compassion and supplies power by his Spirit in and through his Church to affect reconciliation. The Church, far from uninvolved "agent" of his compassion, is more the locus of God's mission than a project undertaken on God's behalf.¹³ The Church participates in this story of the *missio Dei*, which is a "grand story,"

¹⁰ These are but two texts; others include Luke 15, Matt. 10:6, 15:24, 18:14, and John 6:39.

¹¹ David Jacobus Bosch, "Reflections on Biblical Models of Mission," in *Toward the 21st Century in Christian Mission: Essays in Honor of Gerald H. Anderson*, ed. James M. Phillips and Robert T. Coote (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 177.

¹² *Ibid.*, 177-78.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 184.

and "not a list of propositions."¹⁴ In light of this understanding of the *missio Dei*, "evangelism" can only be subsumed under "mission." Mission, as the divine-human partnership in which God's people discern where God is working and join him, involves evangelism as a vital component, but the two are not the same. Confusion of methods and tools of evangelism with mission has been a bane of the Church, creating formulaic and commodified forms of the Gospel bearing little resemblance to the real thing.¹⁵

There is much to consider from a biblical standpoint regarding evangelism, even if the word does not appear in the New Testament. John Finney notes the relationship and nuances between εὐαγγέλιον / εὐαγγελίζω (the noun and verb forms; "gospel" and the "act of proclaiming the gospel"), κήρυγμα (focused on the content of the gospel which is proclaimed), and mustήριον (the gospel as formerly hidden but now divinely and surprisingly revealed), and concludes that "if we need every person of the Trinity to have a full-orbed evangelism, then we cannot afford to concentrate on one aspect and reject the others."¹⁶ There are a limited number of instances of the noun εὐαγγελιστήν, the most notable found in Paul's letter to the Ephesians: "It was [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and

¹⁴ Leonard Hjalmarson, "Newbegin on Church and Mission," <http://nextreformation.com/?p=3984> (accessed December 18, 2010).

¹⁵ For a history of how evangelism has been shaped by prevailing culture, see Finney, *Emerging Evangelism*, 53-88. For an illustration of this commodified form of the gospel among prospective church planters, see Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom: Creating Incarnational Community - The Posture and Practices of Ancient Church Now* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 184-86.

¹⁶ Finney, *Emerging Evangelism*, 34. Finney links the respective words and their forms to historical forms of Christianity (Catholic, Protestant, and Pentecostal) which tend to emphasize one of these at the expense of the others.

some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service" (Eph. 4:11, 12a, NIV).¹⁷

All of which begs the question: "What is the 'gospel'?" Translated, εὐαγγέλιον is "good news." In recent times this "good news" has often been simplified (and sometimes crassly commodified) to a truncated gospel that "Jesus died for my sin so I could go to heaven when I die." However, from a reading of the Gospels (the εὐαγγέλιον as told by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), it is apparent that the "good news" is about much more than "sin-management."¹⁸ Significantly, in the gospels, and particularly for Matthew and Mark, specific links with the "Kingdom of God" or the "Kingdom of Heaven(s)" are made with this good news.¹⁹ Matthew's gospel states that John the Baptist and Jesus launched their public ministries with the same refrain: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matt. 3:2, 4:17, NIV). Shortly thereafter he records that "Jesus went all over Galilee, teaching in the Jewish meeting places and preaching the good news about God's Kingdom" (Matt. 4:23).²⁰ Dallas Willard describes this offer as "a call for us to reconsider how we have been approaching our life, in light of the fact that we now, in the presence of Jesus, have the option of living within the

¹⁷ The other two references are Acts 21:8 and 2 Timothy 4:5.

¹⁸ Dallas Willard, "Spirituality and Ministry" (DMin seminar, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, June 6, 2005). Willard also asks elsewhere, "Should we not at least consider the possibility that this poor result [of a weak church that fails to impact culture] is not in spite of what we teach and how we teach, but precisely because of it?" See Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1998), 40.

¹⁹ Matthew's gospel tends to use "Kingdom of Heaven(s)" rather than Kingdom of God as in the other synoptic gospels, while only three occurrences are found in John's gospel. One should also note the multiple parables Jesus used as a means to describe the Kingdom of Heaven (see especially Matthew 13).

²⁰ See also Luke 4:43, Matt. 9:35, Luke 8:1, and Matt. 24:14. As one writer notes, "His message [of the good news of the Kingdom] did not change in three years of public ministry." Jan David Hettinga, *Follow Me: Experience the Loving Leadership of Jesus* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1996), 134-35.

surrounding movements of God's eternal purposes, of taking our life into his life."

Willard goes on to say that those who took up the offer did so because of "*the striking availability of God to meet present human need through the actions of Jesus*. He simply was the good news about the kingdom. He still is."²¹

This link between the gospel and the Kingdom of God is essential.²² If indeed God's kingdom is the "range of his effective will, where what he wants done is done," then being enfolded into his kingdom means giving up one's own fiefdom, and that for a kind of life where "we find that God comes to act with us as we rely on him in our actions."²³ And so, Willard goes on to say, "We are enabled to integrate the little realm that makes up our life into the infinite rule of God. And that is the eternal kind of life. Caught up in his active rule, our deeds become an element in God's eternal history. They are what God and we do together, making us a part of his life and him a part of ours."²⁴

Defining "Church" with Reference to the Kingdom of God and the Fellowship of Churches of Christ

Another question arises as to the best way to communicate the content of the gospel, and not "deliver" it as if it were a matter of assembly line technology and effective marketing methods. William Abraham's definition of evangelism as "that set of

²¹ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 16, 17; emphasis is in the original.

²² "According to Scripture, the good news John the Baptist preached (Matthew 3:1, 2), that Jesus preached (Matthew 4:17, 23, 9:35; Mark 1:14, 15; Luke 4:43, 8:1, 9:11, 16:16), that Jesus commissioned his followers to preach (Matthew 10:7; Luke 9:2, 60, 10:9-11), that Jesus said would be preached until the end (Matthew 24:14), that Jesus preached after his resurrection (Acts 1:3), and that Jesus' followers preached in their earliest mission work (Acts 8:12, 19:8, 20:25, 28:23, 31), was the gospel of God's kingdom." John Nugent, "Kingdom-Driven Church," *Christian Standard* (September 18, 2005), http://christianstandard.com/2005/09/cs_article-106/ (accessed January 11, 2011).

²³ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 20.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

intentional activities which is governed by the goal of initiating people into the Kingdom of God" helps one from falling prey to such a cultural understanding of the gospel.²⁵ On the other hand, it could potentially leave out the essential role that the Church has in introducing and modeling (that is, incarnating) this Kingdom life Jesus manifests.²⁶

Kurt Frederickson observes, "The [C]hurch is the narrative of God lived out in a way that makes the Kingdom visible."²⁷ This explains the multiple metaphors, analogies, and images found in the New Testament to describe the Church.²⁸ This implies that the Kingdom of God and the Church are not the same entity,²⁹ but also that "whatever God is going to do, he's going to do through all of Christ's people."³⁰ Indeed, it is Christ's promise, in one of two instances of ἐκκλησία in the Gospels (both in Matthew's gospel), that "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Matt. 16:18, NIV).³¹ Further, while one can speak of the Church catholic (the one Church), in practice

²⁵ William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1989), 95. In contrast, David Watson offers a definition explicitly tied to discipleship: "Evangelism is a discipleship process of going from not knowing Christ to people lovingly obeying him." Watson, Watson, and Robertson, "Church Planting Movements Training Conference."

²⁶ It is worth noting Neil Cole's question: "Why is it that when we consider ways to reach out to the lost we always plan events rather than using the natural relationships God has already given us?" Neil Cole, *Church 3.0: Upgrades for the Future of the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 29.

²⁷ Fredrickson, "An Ecclesial Ecology," 68, citing as source: Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 97.

²⁸ Among these images are the body of Christ, the temple of God, the bride of Christ, the flock of God, and the vine and the branches. See Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1960).

²⁹ This is in contrast to views originating with Augustine and Origen; see Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 32. For an explanation of this important differentiation, see Stuart Murray, *Church Planting: Laying Foundations* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), 39-47.

³⁰ Robinson and Smith, *Invading Secular Space*, 166. A favorite statement of Dwight Smith.

³¹ The other is Matthew 18:17; the term ἐκκλησία occurs over 100 times in the remainder of the New Testament, and is usually translated as "assembly" or "church" or "congregation," and also usually refers to the community of Jesus followers. For a more detailed understanding, see Walter Bauer, ed., *A*

and in time and space there are only local expressions of church.³² Archbishop Rowan Williams reflected on the early Christian community's experience of church:

As a bishop in Wales I learned that church is something that *happens*, rather than first of all an institutional constitution. When you look at the New Testament, you see church *happening*. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ created something new, something unprecedented, and something initially deeply confused. Nobody in the New Testament had a theology of the Church that can be bound between covers and transmitted easily. People had instead a profound experience of Christ and one another which when they searched for words gets expressed in terms of this "assembly" convened by the event of Jesus. And the Greek word ἐκκλησία still carries in it that meaning.³³

If the New Testament does not offer a definition of Church, but describes the life of the community of faith without embellishment, using analogies and images to cast its high calling to live out the Kingdom message of the Gospel, it may seem presumptuous to consider "formal" definitions. However, almost every church planter inevitably asks the question "What is church?" because of a corollary question: "How do I know when a church has been planted?" Doing so helps to refine one's thinking of how church should function as a community without dictating the shape of the local expression of church.

The discussion so far suggests that no definition of a local expression of church can be adequate without Jesus at the center of its life, the recognition of God on mission (*missio Dei*) who deigns to partner with his human creation, and the ongoing and experiential reality of the Kingdom of God penetrating every nook and cranny of church

Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. Rev. and ed. by Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 303-304.

³² Regarding *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, see Lesslie Newbigin, "A Local Church Truly United," World Council of Churches, <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/who/crete-03-e.html> (accessed January 6, 2011).

³³ Rowan Williams, "Pioneer Ministry," <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/podcast> (accessed January 16, 2011). The quote is partially edited and paraphrased; the emphasis is the Archbishop's.

and creation.³⁴ Besides these, three other biblical principles and motifs seem relevant to this strategy to plant a simple church network. First, given the fact that no command to plant churches exists in the Bible, but that a clear commission for making disciples who reproduce themselves does (Matt. 28:18-20), a definition should take this into account. Second is the exercise of a community's obedient love (faith) in the contextual reality of liminality.³⁵ In such a situation, a position of marginalization for the Church in the UK is not a threat, but an opportunity. Third, then, is the biblical concept of the people of God as pilgrims on a journey. Kurt Frederickson, summarizing Bosch, writes: "The church is a pilgrim church. It is a wandering people who are called out [and sent back into the world]. This people of God on the journey need just two things: support for the road, and a destination at the end of it. All forms and styles of church are provisional."³⁶

Given these considerations, what follows are definitions that appear most relevant to the aspirations of contributing to a church planting movement in the UK. The first is from the Church Planting Task Group of the Fellowship of Churches of Christ, arising out of a desire to participate with other church traditions to foster a church planting movement: "A church is a disciple-making community of grace based on the Lordship of Jesus Christ who died to reconcile us to the Father and to one another so that we

³⁴ Consider the context of the other use by Jesus in Matthew's gospel of ἐκκλησία normally cited for matters of church discipline, where Jesus promises his presence when just two or three come together in Jesus' name: Matthew 18:20. Cf. Neil Cole, *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 53-54.

³⁵ "Liminality is that situation where people find themselves in an in-between, marginal state in relation to the surrounding society, a place of danger and disorientation." Hirsch also relates liminality to *communitas* (the unique community formed from a common experience and common missional task). See Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 220ff., 283, and Alan J. Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership & Liminality*, Christian Mission and Modern Culture (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997).

³⁶ Fredrickson, "An Ecclesial Ecology," 83, summarizing from Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 373.

cooperate in the power of the Holy Spirit and bring about God's Kingdom on earth.³⁷ A second comes from Neil Cole, who writes that church is "the presence of Jesus among His people called out as a spiritual family to pursue His mission on the planet."³⁸ He supplements that definition by adding a strategic element, the New Testament Discipleship Pattern, as a means of evaluating ministry resources and methods (principles and practices must be "received personally," "repeated easily," and "reproduced strategically").³⁹ Cole says that this will ensure that the appropriate DNA (the pattern of Kingdom life: "divine truth," "nurturing relationships," and "apostolic mission") is present in every part of the church.⁴⁰

With recent but substantial experience in church planting movements (CPM) observed primarily in Africa and India, studied so as to adopt best practices to foster CPMs elsewhere, David Watson promotes this definition:

The church is a group of baptized believers in the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who meet regularly to worship, to nurture (teach obedience [to Jesus] and grow to maturity), and to fellowship (community) and depart those gatherings endeavoring to obey all the commands of Christ in order to transform individuals, families and communities.⁴¹

In CPM training, Watson discusses this definition as the fifth of six transition points any church planting strategy must address.⁴² His definition provides both the "when" and "for

³⁷ From internal documents of the Church Planting Task Group dating June 2006 to June 2007.

³⁸ Cole, *Organic Church*, 53.

³⁹ Cole, *Organic Church*, 110-11.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 109-21, for his elaboration on this definition.

⁴¹ Watson, Watson, and Robertson, "Church Planting Movements Training Conference."

⁴² Each transition point relates to a progressive step of the CPM from early and embryonic form to advanced stages of movement seen in reproducing disciples, leaders, churches, and regional leaders.

what purpose" that will foster communities of reproducing disciples. As a biblical and transcultural rite of passage into the community of faith and the Kingdom, Watson maintains that failing to baptize means to fail to establish a local expression of church. He further argues that attempting to make disciples without baptism will also stop a CPM dead in its tracks, because "discipleship-only movements without church [formalized by baptism] do not last or live beyond a generation."⁴³ In this definition, Watson notes the community must meet together for the internal core practices which enable and empower external missional obedience to Jesus resulting in transformed people(s).

Each definition provided has much to say for it, and one would be hard pressed to quibble with any of them. Both Cole and Watson make explicit the person and presence of Jesus. Cole includes Kingdom of God language, but external to the simple definition; Watson leaves this implied and unstated. Cole makes mission explicit in both the definition and expansion of the definition, while Watson frames the final clause as an expression of mission. Neither Cole's definition nor that of the Fellowship's Church Planting Task Group explicitly mention that formal identification with Jesus is in baptism, which makes the church distinctive from other groups (be they volunteer, task-focused, or affinity based).⁴⁴ Alone among the definitions, that of the Church Planting Task Group exhibits the Trinitarian aspect of the *missio Dei*, but given the value the Fellowship puts on baptism and communion as essential missional practices gifted by

⁴³ Watson, Watson, and Robertson, "Church Planting Movements Training Conference."

⁴⁴ Cole details the place of baptism and communion in his latest book which presents an overview of the Church Multiplication Movement / Organic Church approach; see Cole, *Church 3.0*, 191-208.

God to the Church, it seems strange the definition remains silent about these.⁴⁵ Finally, each of these definitions, importantly, does not limit the essence of church to a meeting or a meeting place, but sees church as a network of relationships.

In light of this chapter's reflections to this point, a personal and tentative working definition can be framed. A "church" will be understood to be "a spiritual family created by Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit to join the Father's mission to bring the Kingdom of God to the world." An expanded definition would highlight those practices which provoke mutual accountability and distinctiveness in baptism and communion. This might be something like "a church is a spiritual family of apprentices dedicated in baptism to Jesus and devoted to lovingly obey him in all things, gifted with his presence and power by the Holy Spirit, who gather in worship around the Lord's table and scatter in service to bring the Father's Kingdom values to all peoples everywhere."

Basic Discipleship and Leadership Characteristics in the New Testament with a Focus on Reproduction

David Watson helpfully observes that the assumptions one brings to studying the Scriptures affects the outcome of that study. Indeed, the questions we propose when we approach the Bible changes what we learn. He asks:

What if we re-read the gospels and ask the question "What was Jesus *doing* to make disciples?" instead of the usual question "What was Jesus *saying* to make disciples?" And what if we re-read the Epistles from "What were Paul and Silas

⁴⁵ For example, "The current missionary paradigm demands that we do no less than place baptism firmly in the broader context of discipleship, seeing its importance as an act of dynamic spiritual significance," and "Communion has a potential place of some significance as a missionary sign. Such a recovery requires that we understand the three key ingredients that are implied in a sacramental view of communion: as an experience of God, as fellowship with others in the body of Christ and as implying involvement with the Word." Martin Robinson, "Notes of Talk Given by Martin Robinson" (presentation at Fellowship of Churches of Christ gathering, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, November 21, 1998).

and Timothy *saying?*" to "What is Paul *doing* to make disciples?" We see then that this is about a disciple-making movement.⁴⁶

Given this theological and practical posture toward the biblical documents, it seems appropriate to review the basic discipleship and leadership characteristics which are required for reproduction of disciples and multiplication of churches. At their most basic, these discipleship qualities are loving obedience to Jesus (trust) and character formation; the leadership qualities are spiritual authority and giftedness.⁴⁷

The Great Commission of Matthew's gospel (Matt. 28:18-20) is the *sine qua non* of this enterprise, but not for the reason normally given. The usual emphasis (in my experience) has been on "Go" rather than "make disciples" (who are to be baptized and taught to obey everything Jesus commanded).⁴⁸ Willard insightfully rephrases Jesus' instruction as follows: "I have been given say over everything in heaven and earth, so go make apprentices to me among people of every kind, submerge them in the reality of the Trinitarian God, and lead them into doing everything I have told you to do. Now look, I am with you every minute, until the job is completely done."⁴⁹ What gives power to these

⁴⁶ Watson, Watson, and Robertson, "Church Planting Movements Training Conference." It is slightly paraphrased, but the emphasis is Watson's. Cf. Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 60. Others make the same observation, as Drane, *McDonaldization*, 13-14.

⁴⁷ This discussion does not elaborate on specific character traits in Jesus to be emulated or specific spiritual or naturally endowed gifts to identify in a disciple. The focus is not on disciple-making techniques or strategy, but on the basic process and relationship between discipleship and leadership development.

⁴⁸ The Greek aorist participle *poreuqéntev* is normally translated as an imperative "Go!", because, as with the other participles (*baptízontev* and *didáskontev*), it relies on the main verb *maqhteúsate*, which is in imperative form. See Donald Alfred Hagner, *Matthew 14-28* (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 886-87.

⁴⁹ Dallas Willard, "Spirituality and Ministry" (DMin seminar, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, June 6, 2005). Willard here uses "apprentice" as preferable to the word "disciple" which has been worn out and misunderstood. "Disciple has come to mean one who does Christian things, while an apprentice is someone who lives with, studies, and listens to the life and teaching of a master."

closing words of Matthew's gospel is that this is what Jesus had done with the twelve. Moreover, the key issue is one of loving obedience to him in this Commission who had, over three years with them, modeled not only what he was asking them to do, and not only what he had trained and equipped them to do, but what he himself did in communal relationship to the Father and from which was the basis of his authority to speak.⁵⁰

Discipleship, broadly speaking, describes the ongoing experiential journey of one who is following Jesus.⁵¹ As Bonhoeffer stated, "Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ."⁵² In addition, it is not a sole endeavor, a kind of "blackjack Christianity" where, as "in the game of blackjack, you care only about your relationship with the dealer."⁵³ Bill Hull offers the observation that "Discipleship isn't for beginners alone; it's for all believers for every day of their life. Discipleship isn't just *one* of the things the church does; it *is* what the church does."⁵⁴ Put another way, discipleship is a community's response to grace, both individual and corporately, enabled by grace.⁵⁵

In this, following Jesus in loving obedience is absolutely essential. There is no progression to maturity without trusting Jesus, no significant godly influence on others

⁵⁰ A host of passages in John's gospel reflect Jesus' preoccupation with loving obedience to the Father (5:19ff., 6:38, 7:16, 7:28, 8:25, 8:42, 9:4, 12:49-50, 14:23-24, 14:31, and 17:4). Compare also those instances where God's voice is heard and recorded as indication of God's approval of Jesus' passionate obedience to the Father: Matt. 3:13ff., 17:1ff.; John 12:23ff., as well as "he learned obedience" (Heb. 5:8).

⁵¹ Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 35.

⁵² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 67.

⁵³ Francis Chan, "Foreword," in *Church 3.0: Upgrades for the Future of the Church*, ed. Neil Cole (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), xi.

⁵⁴ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 24.

⁵⁵ Brennan Manning, *The Signature of Jesus* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2004), 15.

without faithfully following Jesus, and no disciple-making or discipleship without loving obedience to Jesus. It is troubling when a church gives short shrift to the relationship between obedience and experiencing the presence of Jesus.⁵⁶ The apostles of the early church, from the teaching of Jesus (John 14:23) and their own experience with him emphasized that God gives the Holy Spirit "to those who obey him" (Acts 5:32, NIV), whether that exercise of trust be when one first believes (Acts 2:38-39, 8:14ff., 9:17, 10:42ff., 19:2ff.) or when one is maturing in discipleship (Acts 6:1ff., Rom. 5:1-5, 1 Cor. 2:10-14, Eph. 4:30, 1 John 3:24, 4:13, Jude 20). This reflects the aforementioned emphasis that loving obedience to Jesus opens the door to experiencing the promise "I am with you every minute" that transforms one's character and empowers for mission. This is not a novel idea, as this has historically been the aim of the Church's best catechetical processes: "Discipleship is the relationship I stand into Jesus Christ in order that I might take on his character. As his disciple, I am learning from him how to live my life in the Kingdom as he would if he were I. The natural outcome is that my behavior is transformed. Increasingly, I routinely and easily do the things he said and did."⁵⁷

In the Protestant tradition (reflecting modernity), discipleship has often been equated with knowledge of the Bible and delivery of that knowledge. The fact that this view is wrong is evident insofar as the moral and spiritual behavior of the church seems

⁵⁶ The story has been told of a church leader from Asia, who, after a tour of American churches, commented, "It is amazing what can be done without the Holy Spirit." Apocryphal or not, it is accurate enough to have the sting of truth, but with an appreciation that this issue is not limited to the USA.

⁵⁷ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 16, where he quotes Dallas Willard in notes taken at Willard's speech at the Spiritual Formation Forum, Los Angeles, May 2004.

to show little distinctive difference from the culture at large⁵⁸ and the view of many church attendees that "teaching in church is irrelevant to their daily lives."⁵⁹ This has given rise to the term "obedience-based discipleship" in contrast to "knowledge-based."⁶⁰ Still, that "obedience" to the Triune God has to be stated as essential to discipleship shows how far the Church has drifted from the understanding of discipleship as modeled by Jesus to one in which knowledge of truth without application is applauded.⁶¹

Granted, the language of "obedience" in reference to following Jesus and taking on his manner of life is not warmly welcomed by post-moderns in a post-Christendom world where traditional institutional structures are suspect. Nor is it appealing to those who treasure and move within legacy or emerging churches who have experienced abuse within hierarchical power structures. This chapter has therefore shown a preference for using the qualifier "loving" before "obedience" because for many the word "obedience" smacks of power mongering and uncaring dictatorship. Furthermore, it may well be advisable to find language which calls out for the best from a (potential) follower of Jesus without implying a tick box of rules and regulations. In any event, it is important to say

⁵⁸ This seems particularly true in the States; see the article and links, The Barna Group, "Faith Has a Limited Effect On Most People's Behavior," <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/188-faith-has-a-limited-effect-on-most-peoples-behavior> (accessed May 30, 2011).

⁵⁹ In the UK, research about the lack of the Church's cultural distinctiveness is hard to come by. In contrast, the LICC's "Imagine" project suggests that the problem of irrelevant teaching is due to an antiquated church culture whose expression of life is inauthentic in contemporary culture, and under-resourced and under-equipped disciples. Rob Powys-Smith, Research Executive, Christian Research, personal e-mail correspondence, May 23, 2011, and Mark Greene, "Imagine How We Can Reach the UK," www.licc.org.uk/uploaded_media/1233749611-Imagine.pdf (accessed May 30, 2011), 9, 11-12.

⁶⁰ The origins of these terms are not clear, but see Roger Thoman, "Simplifying Discipleship," <http://www.simplechurchjournal.com/2010/03/simplifying-discipleship.html> (accessed January 11, 2011), who prefers "surrender-based discipleship" over "obedience-based discipleship."

⁶¹ "The problem in the church of the West is not in believing the wrong things, but in not obeying the right things we do believe. We are all educated beyond our obedience. More education will only push us farther away from actually obeying the simple truths we already know." See, Cole, *Church 3.0*, 232.

that the kind of loving obedience promoted here, first and foremost, is to Jesus as a leader who can be trusted, by individuals and by churches. It is certainly not unquestioned obedience to a "shepherd" or hierarchical leader, whatever the form of church.⁶²

Actually, the New Testament evidences a call for followers of Jesus to follow the leadership and life models of leaders who themselves are following Jesus.⁶³ In addition, reproduction of oneself as a disciple in another disciple is itself one aspect of discipleship that enables deeper character formation into the image of Christ. It is also indispensable to a church planting movement. The apostle Paul showed he understood this principle when he instructed the church(es) to "follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1) and instructed Timothy to "entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Tim. 2:2, NIV) those things Timothy had seen Paul speak and model.

It is also true that loving obedience to Jesus and the accompanying transformation into the character and life of Jesus which comes is requisite to becoming a godly leader. Of course, as many have noted, one is manifestly not a leader unless one has followers. Here, it is asserted that the focus of leadership in a church is on that kind of man or woman whose base of influence derives from their experiential life with Jesus, that is, his or her discipleship. What expands one's circle of godly leadership is a combination of spiritual authority and giftedness (spiritual and natural). J. Robert Clinton is very helpful in understanding this combination. Clinton defines a godly leader as "any person with a God-given capacity and God-given responsibility who is influencing anyone towards

⁶² There is no suggestion here of adopting the restorationism model of delegated authority and the practices of "heavy shepherding." See Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom*, 158-67, 181-96.

⁶³ See for example, John 13:14-16; 1 Cor. 4:15-17; 2 Thess. 3:7-9; Heb. 6:12, 13:7-8.

God's purposes."⁶⁴ The essential ingredient in this kind of leadership is the "powerful presence of God in the leader's life and ministry."⁶⁵ This powerful presence was noted in Jesus' life numerous times in the observation made by friend and foe alike that "he taught with authority, and not like the teachers of the Law of Moses" (Mark 1:22).⁶⁶ Clinton's expanded definition is as follows: "'Spiritual authority' is that characteristic of a God-anointed leader, developed upon an experiential power base (giftedness, character, deep experiences with God), that enables him or her to influence followers through persuasion, force of modeling, and moral expertise."⁶⁷ While Clinton in his short definition uses "right to influence," it is hardly that of hierarchical forms of positional power, because it is derived from the leader's own discipleship experience with Jesus, and only granted by followers who choose to trust the leader.⁶⁸

The argument here is that loving obedience to Jesus brings renovation of character and deeper experience with him. The more one takes on the life of Jesus as his follower, allowing God more encompassing influence on one's thinking and actions, the more one

⁶⁴ J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1988), 197. Skills and competence play an important role in effectiveness and fruitfulness at basic and advanced levels of disciple-making and leadership, but are outside the scope of this final project.

⁶⁵ J. Robert Clinton, "Mining Biblical Insights for Leadership" (DMin seminar, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, October 19, 2004).

⁶⁶ See also Matt. 7:29, Mark 1:27, Luke 4:32, 36.

⁶⁷ J. Robert Clinton, "Mining Biblical Insights for Leadership" (DMin seminar, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, October 22, 2004).

⁶⁸ Ibid. His short definition says, "Spiritual authority is the right to influence, conferred upon a leader by followers because of their recognition of God's touch on the leader's life as evidenced by godly character, spiritual experiences with and knowledge of God, and demonstration of God-given giftedness in ministry." Clinton also notes that "a leader's growth in leading from this power base comes in stages as one uses, understands, and rejects or appropriately uses other forms of power or authority."

enjoys intimacy with Jesus and experience of his loving leadership.⁶⁹ As a byproduct, this brings spiritual authority. As this spiritual authority is recognized and humbly exercised, spiritual and naturally endowed giftedness becomes apparent. As that giftedness is practiced, increasing proficiency in using that gift mix to serve others also contributes to expanding influence and spiritual authority. When this happens in community (church), where there is appropriate and loving accountability for both leaders and followers, healthy disciples can be made who reproduce. Surely this is something of what the astonished assembled Jewish leaders noted of Peter and John, that "they were unschooled, ordinary men," and that "these men had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13, NIV).

Therefore, while recognizing that disciple-making and leadership development is not the same thing; it is nevertheless true that the second builds on and is inextricably tied to the first.⁷⁰ Mentoring and coaching systems or leadership development processes undertaken without reference to basic discipleship practices will reproduce something, but not necessarily healthy followers of Jesus. When healthy disciples are being (re)produced, some of these Jesus followers will demonstrate leadership capacities which can be nurtured and released for ministry. Faithfulness in the seemingly insignificant and mundane brings opportunity for more leadership influence in the Kingdom (Luke 16:10).

Prayer and Gospel Sowing as Prerequisites to a Movement

⁶⁹ "The quality of the church's leadership is directly proportional to the quality of discipleship Discipleship is primary; leadership is always secondary. And leadership, to be genuinely Christian, must always reflect Christlikeness and therefore . . . discipleship." Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 119.

⁷⁰ Neil Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God* (Carol Stream: ChurchSmart Resources, 1999), 36.

No one "bad mouths" prayer when the church planting task is considered; all "know" that the job is far too big or challenging as a solely human endeavor. And yet, one wonders how many church planters and church planting teams in the Western context have a kind of "practical atheism" which acknowledges the need to pray and even creates programs for prayer support of a church plant, but which seeks to have God's approving hand of empowerment without reference to his will or direction. Sometimes, a kind of third person language in reference to God is used that sounds like God can be pressurized to act or is "required" to act by virtue of a formula of prayer. Instead, a call remains for a kind of prayer life as that which is evidenced by Jesus and the early church which brings an individual and a community into the work God is already doing (*missio Dei*), rather than inventing or creating something he does not intend. Certainly, while there are numerous strategies and practices of prayer which can be adopted, it is crucial to put forward that it is God (Father, Son and Spirit) who is the source of power, spiritual breakthrough, and all "movement" behind church planting, but not because he can be manipulated to exercise his power and authority.

Therefore, with respect to prayer, two aspects are to be noted as pertains to the third place if this incipient network is to play a part in a church planting movement. First, there is prayer as "listening" in which a person "attends" to or "abides" (as a manner of life) in ongoing reliance upon God for daily life and direction (John 15:5). God is the focus and not his power. The prayer practices of Jesus evidence a profound reliance on the Father that sustained him in life, suffering, death, and even resurrection: all connected

to his listening posture toward his Father.⁷¹ It must also be the case that Jesus' command for delay in Jerusalem by those first followers (Acts 1:4, 8) had everything to do with listening to and relying fully on God: "The sheep know their shepherd's voice. I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep, and they know me" (John 10:2, 14). Taken a step further in regard to the third place, the focus here is listening that will discern where God is working so the church can join him.

Second, there is the aspect of specific prayer practices which both undergird a "listening" kind of spiritual life, but also petition God, as children do with a parent, to act in ways that are entirely consistent with his character and will (Luke 11:11-13). While recent surveys cannot prove a causal link, they at least illustrate the mystical connection between church planting fruitfulness and prayer, presumably because of a listening for obedience posture as well as a leader or community's persistence in asking the Father to act for his honor and glory.⁷² These seem to confirm Jesus' words: "apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5, NIV), and some of the prayer practices of the early church.⁷³

Having made the point, organizing oneself and others for strategic, persevering, and intercessory prayer can be promoted and coordinated: "Pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you" (1 Thess. 3:1,

⁷¹ Some examples include Jesus going off by himself on a hill or mountain to pray (Matt 14:23), praying out loud before crowds (John 11:41) and before the disciples (John 17:1ff.), and instruction on prayer (Matt. 6:5ff., Luke 18:1ff.). There are also the not insignificant references throughout John's gospel that illustrate his determination to do what he sees his Father doing. See footnote 50 earlier in this chapter.

⁷² For examples, see Glenn Kendall and Dick Grady, "Seven Keys to Effective Church Planting," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (October, 1992): 367; Joel Comiskey, *Leadership Explosion: Multiplying Cell Group Leaders to Reap the Harvest* (Houston: Touch Publications, 2000), 46; and David Watson, "Church Planting Essentials - Prayer," <http://www.davidlwatson.org/2007/12/27/church-planting-essentials-prayer/> (accessed February 21, 2011).

⁷³ Acts 3:42-47, 4:23-31, 6:5-7, and 12:5-17.

NIV); and, "Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints" (Eph. 3:18, NIV).⁷⁴ This kind of organized prayer includes the church planter, the church planting team and emerging church, and at least two networks, urges David Watson. The first network incorporates friends of the church planter; the second network includes all those people who pray for the people or people group being reached.⁷⁵ David Garrison's analysis, which highlights "ten universal elements [observed] in every Church Planting Movement," notes the first and foremost universal element as "Extraordinary Prayer."⁷⁶ He explains two intuitive and five "counter-intuitive" kinds of extraordinary prayer and lives of prayer which permeate the groundwork, foundation, building, and sustaining of a movement.⁷⁷ From his recent and practical experience in seeing church planting movements in East Africa, David Hunt agrees, saying "No amount of planning, strategizing, witnessing, training or modeling can accomplish God's vision of reaching entire communities without paying the price in [intercessory] prayer."⁷⁸

⁷⁴ These are but two examples. Others include Eph. 6:18-20, 1 Thess. 5:25, 1 Tim. 2:8, Heb. 13:8.

⁷⁵ David Watson, "Let's Bake a Cake (Getting Ready for a CPM)," *CPMJournal* (January-March 2006): 25.

⁷⁶ V. David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements: How God Is Redeeming a Lost World* (Midlothian, VA: WIGTake Resources, 2004), 172-73.

⁷⁷ Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 173-77. The "intuitives" are prayer for missionaries and the lost people group. The five "counter-intuitives" are prayer modeled by the missionaries and church planters, for the new believers, by the new believers, between networks of partners, and for more workers.

⁷⁸ David F. Hunt, "A Revolution in Church Multiplication in East Africa: Transformational Leaders Develop a Self-Sustainable Model of Rapid Church Multiplication" (DMin diss., Bakke Graduate University, June 2009), x, 96; available for download from <http://www.davidlwatson.org/2010/07/23/a-revolution-in-church-multiplication-in-east-africa/>. May 2011 figures for the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia to Côte d'Ivoire) as this CPM enters its sixth year indicate 14,560 churches started, 555,042 baptized believers, and 291,602 Muslim background believers. There are now 32 identifiable CPMs among sub-Saharan African peoples. Paul Watson, "Church Planting Movements Training Conference – Level 2" (training lecture at Elim Conference Centre, West Malvern, England, May 23-26, 2011).

Church planting movement proponents find in Luke 10:1-24 (along with Luke 9:1-9, Matt. 10:5-16, and Mark 6:6-13), a strategic human element in obeying the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20), but also a divine element in asking God to do what he already wants to do but wants people to share in with him. Cole sees Christ's teaching in these as explaining "missional principles for extending His kingdom in dark places to catalyze a movement."⁷⁹ Here, Jesus gives instructions to pray for workers in the harvest, and Cole recommends spreading the "Luke 10.2b" virus as an ongoing cry to God.⁸⁰

If there can be no church planting movement (CPM) without being in step with God in prayer, neither can there be one without abundant gospel sowing. Garrison calls this "abundant evangelism." The idea behind this is sowing the "Gospel of the Kingdom" generously so as to reap abundantly. So, writes Garrison, "If prayer links a Church Planting Movement to God, then evangelism is its connection with the people. Essential to every movement is the principle of over-sowing."⁸¹ Two conventional approaches to church planting in the West can work at cross-purposes to abundant gospel sowing that will foster conditions for a CPM. First is the laudable but "less effective pattern of gospel transmission" that relies on coming in as an outsider into a given area, establishing a

⁷⁹ Cole, *Church 3.0*, 185, as do Watson and others. Besides intuitive and counter-intuitive prayer elements, Steve Hawthorne expands on five observations about the practice of prayer coinciding with the discipling/new church planting strategy of Luke 10. See Steve Hawthorne, "Seeing 'Counter-intuitive' Prayer in CPMs," *CPMJournal* (April-June 2006): 22-29.

⁸⁰ Cole gets people to set an alarm for prayer at 10:02 each day, which I have been doing likewise for two years. See Cole, *Organic Church*, 175. See also Linda Bergquist and Allan Karr, *Church Turned Inside Out: A Guide for Designers, Refiners, and Re-aligners* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 83-4; and Jim Montgomery, "Which Comes First: Strategy or Prayer?" *CPMJournal* (April-June 2006): 17-21.

⁸¹ Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 177. This idea has origins in Matt. 13:3ff. (Parable of the Sower), and 2 Cor. 9:6 (see also Mark 4:26-29, 1 Cor. 3:5-9).

presence and trust among locals, and then waiting for the soil to be ready to sow.⁸² The other is conducting all sorts of demographic research that belies an "underlying belief that a demographic match between the planter and the area is all we need to effectively target a ministry area. This superficial type of listening is about generalities and stereotypes, and therefore it often misses the mark."⁸³ Saying this is not to deny the importance of either localized trust and credibility or demographic awareness and sensitivity; it is only to say that abundant gospel sowing is an essential practice to identify discipleship soil among "insiders" that is immediately ready for the Kingdom of God to take root.

Taken in combination, prayer and abundant gospel sowing exemplify something akin to what the *mission-shaped church* report calls "double listening." The report refers to a process of listening to a culture where a church is to be planted, and listening to the inherited tradition of the gospel and the Church.⁸⁴ Here, however, in the sense of what would contribute to a CPM, it refers to the ongoing discipline of listening to the response when the gospel is sown (in the context of the times and tensions and issues of ordinary people), and also listening to God with a humble and willing spirit. Where these intersect, then, is the action of discerning where God is already at work in specific groups or individuals. Put another way, prayer and abundant gospel sowing practiced in tandem help to identify a "person of peace" (Luke 10.6). The person of peace and his or her

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Halter and Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom*, 132. Compare also the approach of Dave Browning, who says: "The Deliberately Simple church will go anywhere to reach anyone. We don't waste time on demographic studies. We don't have a target audience. Jesus already told us to make disciples of all nations and go to the ends of the earth. We don't feel the need to be particularly selective, if he is not going to be." David Browning, *Deliberate Simplicity: How the Church Does More by Doing Less*, The Leadership Network Innovation Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 158; see also 51.

⁸⁴ Church of England General Synod, *mission-shaped church*, 104-5.

affinity/family group then becomes the focus of time and energy, and it is with this person and sphere of relationships that a Discovery Bible Study can be initiated.⁸⁵

Church Planting Movements

Up to this point, a definition for a church planting movement (CPM) has not been provided. This is partly because the term has undergone development, because of misuse and misapplication, and partly due to slightly different approaches to understanding what descriptive terms should be used for what is being observed in various international settings. Watson and Cole, for their part, have a concern that the term is being watered down such that "traditional" ministries are defining themselves as CPMs when there is no such thing happening at all.⁸⁶ The original working definition by David Garrison tries to capture what was already being observed in many cultures: "a rapid multiplication of indigenous churches planting churches that sweeps through a people group or population segment."⁸⁷ Garrison calls it a descriptive statement, inasmuch as to admit that the work of a CPM belongs to God, and since CPMs are a way that God is drawing people into relationship with him, are to be studied so that those who yearn for God's glory can align themselves with God and participate with him (*missio Dei*).⁸⁸ While not comprehensive, it concentrates on God getting the recognition for fruit in the divine-human partnership.

⁸⁵ A Discovery Bible Study in CPM strategy intentionally embeds DNA so elements of church and discipleship are already in place as participants decide to follow Christ. Chapter 7 discusses this further.

⁸⁶ David Watson, "Church Planting Essentials - Recognizing Emerging CPMs," <http://www.davidlwatson.org/2010/01/15/church-planting-essentials-recognizing-emerging-cpms/> (accessed July 3, 2010). Cole makes the same observation: "We run the risk of losing the meaning of the word if thrown out too liberally." See Cole, *Church 3.0*, 71. A similar phenomenon has been happening with the word "missional."

⁸⁷ Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 2.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 2, 26-28.

David Watson has developed a more comprehensive definition, for at least two reasons. First, he wants to bring some rigor to measuring what is being observed, but second, to include in the definition itself basic principles and practices which have been identified as existing in legitimately-named CPMs. Ostensibly, this serves to filter out inaccurate or misleading claims while encouraging the adoption of these principles and practices by those who aspire to join God's activity in the form of CPMs.

A CPM is an indigenously led Gospel Planting and obedience-based discipleship process that has resulted in a minimum of 100 new locally initiated and led churches, three generations deep, within two years. There is trained leadership in each church, and each leader relates to a mentor. Every-Member obedience-based discipleship that leads to ministry in the community is the norm for all new Believers and leaders. The outsider who may have initiated/catalyzed the process is not considered the first generation. The outside leader may maintain a mentoring relationship with the growing leadership of the movement.⁸⁹

This definition has been modified; reproduction must now be four generations deep.⁹⁰

It may be that the terminology of church planting movements, only known and accepted in the last decade, is actually misnamed. While the evident result may be reproducing churches, the initial task is a disciple-making movement.⁹¹ Or maybe it is a "Prayer Movement."⁹² The fact is that there must be multiplication at multiple levels, and hence Cole's preference for the term "Church Multiplication Movement" (CMM). He maintains, "What truly distinguishes a multiplication movement from a planting

⁸⁹ David Watson, "Church Planting Movement (CPM) - Our Definition," <http://www.davidlwatson.org/2010/01/15/church-planting-essentials-recognizing-emerging-cpms/> (accessed January 12, 2011). This is the earlier blog post of June 15, 2009; it is repeated in a January 2010 blog posting.

⁹⁰ Watson, Watson, and Robertson, "Church Planting Movements Training Conference."

⁹¹ A Skype training class actually uses that terminology. See Paul Watson, "Course: Making Disciples that Become Movements," <http://www.reachingtheonlinegeneration.com/2010/05/19/class-making-disciples-that-become-movements/> (accessed January 12, 2011).

⁹² Felicity Dale, "A Prayer Movement Must Precede a Church Planting Movement," *CPMJournal* (April-June 2006): 34-40.

movement is that there are multiple generations of reproduction found in all levels of church life, rather than simply the addition of a large number of churches."⁹³ Though Cole refrains from incorporating it into his definition of a movement, he does agree that multiplication language cannot be used until a fourth generation can be identified, consistent with 2 Tim. 2:2.⁹⁴

The key question, for the third place, has to do with what a church planting / church multiplication movement (CPM/CMM) might look like in the UK. Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird have offered a definition they think fits a Western context, though they have North America primarily in mind. In *Viral Churches*, they propose that "a church multiplication movement is a rapid reproduction of churches planting churches, measured by a reproduction rate of 50 percent through the third generation of churches, with new churches having 50 percent new converts."⁹⁵ No specific justification for this definition is given, except Stetzer's reservations that a CPM as defined by Garrison is unlikely ever to be found in industrial democracies because these societies lack some of the cultural factors in the tribal world.⁹⁶ One would like to know more for a proper response, but this is an unconvincing argument, because post-moderns in the post-Christendom West seem

⁹³ Cole, *Church 3.0*, 73.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 75. Not considered here are five key characteristics of missionary movements described by Steve Addison, *Movements That Change the World* (Smyrna: Missional Press, 2009), 22-24.

⁹⁵ Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird, *Viral Churches: Helping Church Planters Become Movement Makers* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 5. This is equivalent to saying a church needs to plant a church that reproduces itself every two years with one-half being new apprentices to Jesus.

⁹⁶ Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 169-70. Garrison and Stetzer collaborated on identifying seven barriers in the industrial world hindering CPMs. Ibid., 181.

increasingly tribal,⁹⁷ and the outworking of the other church planting movement strategies involves identifying communities within communities (silos).⁹⁸

Nevertheless, their book promotes a similar paradigm shift in church planting from addition to multiplication, and they outline obstacles to multiplication in the North American setting they believe can be overcome.⁹⁹ Moreover, they acknowledge that there are presently no observable movements in a "western industrial democratized context," from which to more confidently assert a definition; one can conclude that theirs is actually a temporary and tentative working definition, informed, yes, by their reservoir of research and experience, but tentative all the same.¹⁰⁰ Still, the fact is that there is a need to start somewhere if ever a church planting or church multiplication movement is to proceed from imagination to reality in the UK. So, because there are enough similarities between North America and the UK to do so, it seems fitting to adopt this as tentative working definition for the thirdplace network.

There are two final observations to be made regarding the content of this chapter.

Firstly, if there is to be a genuine movement, and a role for the thirdplace in it, it still must

⁹⁷ See for instance, Seth Godin, *Tribes: We Need You to Lead Us* (New York: Portfolio, 2008). While Godin limits his consideration of tribes to the realm of the online world and business, what he says seems applicable in the off-line and non-business world as well.

⁹⁸ "Silos" are small segments or groups forming naturally within a community. This is an unfamiliar word in the English context, and may need replacing with something more fitting, culturally speaking. Paul Watson, "Starting Gospel Movements on Campus: Communities and Silos," <http://www.reachingtheonlinedgeneration.com/2009/12/03/starting-gospel-movements-on-campus-communities-and-silos/> (accessed August 14, 2010).

⁹⁹ Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 170-83. They list five means by which these obstacles can be overcome, abundant prayer and evangelism being the first two. *Ibid.*, 181-2.

¹⁰⁰ The authors seem to intimate as much without being explicit. Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 181. Cole has recently addressed the question if movement is being seen amongst his networks. Neil Cole, "Are There Church Planting Movements in North America?," *Mission Frontiers* (March-April 2011), <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/are-there-church-planting-movements-in-north-america> (accessed June 23, 2011).

clearly be the work of God. A movement by definition must be out of control, but even if out of human control, there remains an indispensable and God-ordained human role.¹⁰¹ In this partnership, people who faithfully follow Jesus enjoy spiritual intimacy with him. These disciples become contagions of the Kingdom, sowing good news.¹⁰² These same apprentices find optimum growth together in community. While cooperating with God in all these elements may then produce conditions conducive for a church planting movement, if a movement should take place it still remains a mysterious but wonderful work of God. Any participation enjoyed in this movement would be similar to that of Garrison Keillor's response to a question in a *Time* magazine article marking his 40 years in radio. "How," he was asked, "did you master both writing and oral story telling?" His reply was "I didn't. There's no mastery to be had. You love the attempt. You don't master a story any more than you master a river. You feel lucky to canoe down it."¹⁰³

Secondly, this chapter has sought to outline my own fundamental theological and biblical assumptions behind the experimentation being conducted in the third place strategy discussed later. It can be acknowledged these assumptions have characteristics of both contemplative and evangelical spiritualities. Though these assumptions lean to the latter, there is no intent or desire to be categorized as one or the other. However, if one

¹⁰¹ Garrison and Watson, among others studying CPMs, note that certain elements are present in every movement. If one or more are missing, a movement does not occur or stalls. See Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 171ff, where he lists ten, while Watson lists twenty in David Watson, "Church Planting Essentials - Critical Elements," <http://www.davidwatson.org/2008/04/04/church-planting-essentials-critical-elements/> (accessed January 24, 2011). As understanding of CPMs has grown, this has increased to twenty-three critical elements, and is being used as an evaluation tool in a monthly Skype coaching conference. Elements are from Paul Watson, "Making Disciples That Become Movements."

¹⁰² Something akin to the "Jesus sneeze" Hirsch describes. See Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 211.

¹⁰³ Garrison Keillor, "10 Questions for Garrison Keillor," *Time* (December 21, 2009), <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1946961,00.html> (accessed January 11, 2011).

were pushed to follow a more contemplative tradition in reference to church planting, then that might suggest an approach similar to new monasticism.¹⁰⁴ For my part, following the "lean" of these foundational assumptions may indeed reflect more of an evangelical-orientated spirituality, but that is only incidental to pursuing God in my own discipleship and providing a base for the experimental strategy of Part Three.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Originally suggested by Jonathan R. Wilson, *Living Faithfull in a Fragmented World: Lessons for the Church from MacIntyre's After Virtue* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), and more recently developed and popularized by Rutba House, *School(s) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism* (Eugene: Cascade, 2005). See also www.newmonasticism.org.

¹⁰⁵ See D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1993) 1-17, where he notes and describes four marks of "Evangelical religion": conversionism, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism. McGrath adds "Christocentrism," says David Hilborn, "Evangelicalism: A Brief Definition," Evangelical Alliance, http://www.eauk.org/about/what_is.cfm (accessed April 11, 2011). See Alister E. McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995). Willard makes an observation relevant to this paragraph that "grace is not opposed to effort, but to earning." Though he's speaking in regard to practicing spiritual disciplines, it also provides an important corrective to the "activism" of evangelical spirituality which must be seen as a response to the good news of the gospel of the Kingdom, and not a means of gaining entry into this Kingdom. See Andy Peck, "Kingdom Living," Dallas Willard, <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=92> (accessed July 4, 2011). Originally published in *Christianity + Renewal* (May 2002); full publication details unavailable.

CHAPTER 5

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE JOURNEY TO A SIMPLE FORM OF CHURCH

The personal story in the Introduction describes only the bare outline of a spiritual and experiential journey towards this experimental form of simple church and aspirations for a simple church network. The previous chapter highlighted theological and biblical concepts which, in a broad sense, have grounded the experimentation and strategy implementation undertaken to date, and that will do so in the future. What remains is to provide a kind of autobiographical description of relevant pivot point experiences that raised issues, required personal and communal reflection on practices, and then shaped the direction towards adopting a simple church form that one prays will contribute to a church planting movement. This chapter will firstly describe some of the key events and experiences which have shaped this journey. Secondly, it brings together some thinking about forms of church that has contributed to pursuing a simple form of church.

The story of the journey begins before the inception of the third place, and long before planting Dickens Heath Village Church. The story is limited to a selection of events and experiences, told in four parts in case study form for theological reflection

somewhat along the lines of the "pastoral cycle" described by Paul Ballard and John Pritchard.¹ While each of the four stories individually illustrate this cycle in an, albeit, abbreviated fashion, it is the larger macro view of the case studies combined which is the focus, insofar as they illustrate critical incidents in the journey to the third place approach to simple church.

Experimentation in the Cell Church Model

The first set of experiences dates to the period 1995 to 1998, beginning a year after entry into England. Having dedicated six months to cultural orientation, settling-in of the family, and initial contacts with local church leaders, three areas of ministry and outreach were undertaken. One was the Newshounds holiday club, another was a twice yearly *DivorceCare* course, and a third was experimentation in the cell church model, undergirded by an incarnational presence in the community.

We thought and prayed about how to develop a local ministry identity in the Cranmore area of Shirley. We observed that no local churches held holiday clubs for children aged five to eleven with unchurched children and families. Due to our limited experience in English culture, we recruited partners from two local churches to plan the approach and ensure cultural awareness and sensitivity. One result of this team's formation and discussion was to use a journalistic theme called Newshounds, and the use of Bible stories in a very low key fashion. The success of that summer club in 1995 led to similar clubs during school half-term and term breaks for many years afterwards as a means of outreach to families.

During this time, we were considering the shape of any future church, and our steps to getting there. Nationally, there was discussion about the cell church model, so we began studying it, reading books, and attending training seminars. In

¹ The "pastoral cycle" is described as a four-stage process of "experience, exploration, reflection, and action" that "starts with the present situation, which is subject to analysis to reveal the truth of what is going on. Then comes the stage of theological reflection, asking how the gospel should be heard in these circumstances, [and] elucidating the path of Christian obedience. On this basis plans can be laid, targets set out, [and] resources deployed. On its turn this leads to action which becomes the basis for further reflection." Paul H. Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 2006), 71, 85-86.

discussions with our CMF teammates we discerned that this form of church was very different to anything we had experienced previously. We determined, as a family, to forego Sunday church attendance in any of the local traditional churches with whom we were building relationships of trust and credibility. We also arranged for a family cell church experience to meet on Sunday afternoons, for a period of six months, with another Christian couple from our team.

When this experience concluded, we felt ready to start a cell group. We identified two unchurched, non-Christian families in our neighborhood involved in Newshounds. We asked if they would join in an experiment, doing something "newshoundish" on Sunday evenings. They agreed, and we began meeting using a cell church approach. We also came alongside a couple in a more deprived area (Rubery, southwest side of Birmingham) to lead a cell church with them.

In 1997 we started *DivorceCare*, the first local support group for people experiencing the breakup of a marriage or long-term relationship. At the end of 1997 and through summer 1998, our family spent nine months furloughing in the States. Newshounds and both cell groups continued to meet during that time, led by an American family who lived in our house as our furlough replacements. Upon our return, *DivorceCare* re-commenced while the cell church in Rubery folded after two months. The cell church meeting in our home continued.

This discussion will be limited to three observations. First, both the Newshounds club(s) and the *DivorceCare* course(s) were attempts to meet local needs and build a base of relational contacts. The hope was to identify individuals and families to invite into relationship with Jesus, though there was also a personal discomfort in that there was no "church" to which to invite these new friends to attend. This approach of finding a way to meet local needs seemed the only natural way forward, and was adopted because this seemed to be the *modus operandi* of church planting in the American context (even if left unquestioned for applicability in the UK context). At the time, there was no personal understanding of the *missio Dei*, though there was the desire to show compassion and care in a helping ministry. Truth be told, in these early days (and in a fashion not to be emulated), there was also the unspoken and internal pressure to work very hard, to be seen to be "doing something" in order to "make something happen." One hoped that this would please God; one also hoped that this would please American supporters.

Second, successfully navigating cultural sensitivities with appropriate approaches to local ministry relied on "insiders" who knew the local culture. This worked especially well with the first holiday club, setting the standard for successful holiday clubs as a means of missional outreach for years to follow. While *DivorceCare* relied on American materials, and was led by Americans, experience with the first group demonstrated that these could be overcome; in part by the profound need these individuals had to overcome their pain, and in part because they learned to help each other, often continuing their conversations by going to a local pub after the meeting had concluded. On the face of it, this kind of sensitivity was not followed by the American furlough replacement's help with regard to the Rubery cell group, and it contributed to the closure of that cell group.

Third, adopting the cell church model as a way of planting a church seemed a sensible transitional step from something small to something more akin to church as traditionally understood. Cell church thinking argued that a cell group could and should be considered church in its own right. Proponents also said that there was a significant difference between a program-based design church which added cells as another program and a church that is comprised of cells. They used the language of "cell, congregation, and celebration" to describe how these cells would be church together, though the language of "network" was not used as it is today.² One reason for adopting the cell church approach can be attributed to Peter Wagner's well-circulated and infamous

² From the USA, Ralph Webster Neighbour and Lorna Jenkins, *Where Do We Go from Here? A Guidebook for Cell Group Churches* (Houston: Touch Publications, 1990), and William A. Beckham, *The Second Reformation: Reshaping the Church for the Twenty-first Century* (Houston: Touch Publications, 1995). From the UK, Laurence Singlehurst, *Loving the Lost: The Principles and Practice of Cell Church* (Eastbourne, UK: Kingsway Publications, 2001). For a brief overview, see Bob Hopkins, "Explaining Cell Churches," <http://www.acpi.org.uk/downloads/Explaining%20Cell%20Churches.pdf> (accessed June 1, 2011). Neighbour and Beckham, hosted by Singlehurst, led a UK training conference in 1993.

statement at the DAWN 2000 Congress (Birmingham, 1992) that a church plant should not be started with anything less than a core of fifty people. Considering that the average attendance of an English church had less than that, the low rumbling response of those in attendance was not surprising, even if it was to Wagner.³ In any case, any sense of strategy which appears in the case study is illusory; it was being made up along the way.

As to the form of church itself, this was incredibly challenging on a personal level, because a pattern and habit of church attendance and leadership was built on the familiar traditional church paradigm with Sunday morning in a building as the locus of worship and community. Feelings of guilt about not being "a good Christian" in Sunday morning services, and wondering what the neighbors would think brought the realization that the traditional paradigm was deeply embedded (as well as some personal issues to resolve). Moreover, rote repetition of the cell church format (welcome, word, worship, and witness) did not in itself ensure discipleship, reproduction of disciples or leaders, or reproduction of cell churches. The experience highlighted a need to address these, but the inbred constraints of the traditional form of ministry, leadership, and church were deeper than one could see or admit at the time.

A Shift in Church Planting Focus from Shirley to Dickens Heath Village

The second set of experiences covers a time period between 1998 and 2002. Toward the end of 1998, the construction of Dickens Heath Village as a new build area adjoining Shirley was well underway. Relationships with churches in the community yielded a partnership with two of them to initiate a church plant in the village. The

³ Martin Robinson, e-mail correspondence with author, Birmingham, UK, June 1, 2011. See also Robinson, *Planting Mission-shaped Churches Today*, 21-29.

progression of local and incarnational ministry brought CMF colleagues to Shirley to form a church planting team, and unexpected shifts in our ministry focus and location.

After our first successful Christmas pantomime by the Shirley cell group among a largely unchurched constituency in 1998, we developed an increasing ministry presence and influence in the community in 1999 that began to include Dickens Heath. Our summer "Western Week" Newshounds club combined a variety of children, youth, and adult events that was well attended and staffed in every respect. The presence of our first large American mission team enabled us to hold the club simultaneously in Shirley and Dickens Heath. We launched a youth club and Alpha Course in the autumn of that year. The year ended with the consortium of developers in Dickens Heath Village offering us a plot of land for a £1 if we could finance a building on the site being made available for a church.

Early 2000 saw our first baptismal service. Five youth and adults from the three families in our Shirley cell group were baptized. While activities in Shirley continued unabated, those in Dickens Heath also began to grow. A cell group was started in the village, plans outlined and implemented for a community needs survey, and the first village-wide Christmas celebration was held. All the same, we were beginning to feel a pull between the two locales as distinct and different communities even if they were only a five-minute drive from each other.

The next year, 2001, proved to be decisive in a change of ministry focus and location. Our CMF colleagues Aaron and Diane joined our family in late August; we jointly undertook an evaluation of ministry and outreach in Dickens Heath and Shirley that would lead to a church plant. Reluctantly, it was agreed that plants in both locations would not be possible. Dickens Heath became the focus from late 2001 in preparation for a public launch of worship services in September 2002 coinciding with the opening of the new primary school. A decision was also made to focus on developing people rather than a building, and the offer for a plot of land from the consortium of developers was not taken up.

It is no understatement to say that this season felt pregnant with possibilities. An incarnational approach had enmeshed our family in the community in a myriad of ways only hinted at by the case study story. This patient and persistent approach brought credibility with church and unchurched people alike, including ongoing opportunities for spiritual conversations with families in Shirley. However, it has to be said that many (if not most) of these conversations lacked an organic nature, and tended to be in the context of programmatic approaches, particularly as it is now apparent, upon reflection,

that the way cell church was being conducted was only a bridge to something more traditional. This was also true in the home-based Alpha course. The filtering approach suggested by Singlehurst, while helpful, was nevertheless being used programmatically.⁴ In retrospect, it is clear that a programmatic approach is not limited to inherited or legacy forms of church. This same sort of program-based approach can occur without church structures as traditionally known, because the leader(s) still work to that paradigm.⁵

This became evident when our colleagues joined the church planting work already underway, creating a much needed synergism. There existed the nous among the two couples to realize that both the Shirley and Dickens Heath locations were going to be different in demographic and socio-economic aspects, but not the experience or creativity to think of a form of church differently that might eliminate or minimize the geographical challenges accompanying these demographic and socioeconomic realities. None of us could imagine anything other than a church plant that fit more of the legacy approach. In fact, resolute agreement existed with American church growth theory that identified new housing areas as prime locations for church plants.⁶ This blinkered thinking was further reinforced by an attractive offer from the consortium of developers for a plot of land in

⁴ Singlehurst suggests a filtering strategy that sows the gospel according to receptivity. A "Sowing 1" strategy has the goal for Christians to show that "God is good, and I'm OK." This is an incarnational approach. A "Sowing 2" strategy brings in the goal of increasing content and understanding of the gospel. Following that comes "Reaping," which in the book focuses on programmatic events. Laurence Singlehurst, *Sowing, Reaping, Keeping: People-Sensitive Evangelism* (Leicester: Crossway, 1995), 54ff.

⁵ "Much of church life today is program- and performance-driven, so the temptation to apply techniques to small church life is very strong, [particularly by leaders]." Robert Banks and Julia Banks, *The Church Comes Home* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2006), 90-91.

⁶ This is for at least two reasons: first, because of increased receptivity by unchurched people due the experience of change in their lives in moving to a new area, and second, by those already Christian looking for a church home in a new community. See Donald Anderson McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Irving, TX: ICI University Press, 1996), considered the father of church growth theory.

the village center. Even then, while time and effort was exerted to see if this could be taken up, we failed to creatively conceive a means to finance a multi-purpose building.

In addition, while the primary nexus of incarnational relationships were located in Shirley, these were sidelined for relationship building in Dickens Heath. The hope was that people from the webs of relationships in Shirley would "make the move" with us to the church plant in Dickens Heath; this was at best naïve, and at worst, self-deceptive. An incarnational approach in the village was also flawed; only one of the four families on the initial advisory group that became the church leadership team resided in the village.

The Experience of Planting Dickens Heath Village Church as a Form of Traditional Church

The third set of experiences spans the period between late 2002 and mid-2006. This corresponds to the public launch of Dickens Heath Village Church (DHVC) in September 2002, the building of congregational life with Sunday morning worship gatherings and small groups, forms of purportedly missional outreach, concluding with disengagement from leadership. This includes the first three years of DMin studies. Only a narrow selection of experiences that are relevant to the journey are highlighted.

Our public launch was exciting! Over 100 friends and interested people gathered on the day. In that first year, we settled into an average Sunday morning attendance of adults, youth, and children numbering in the sixties, with just slightly more than half coming from outside the village. Besides the two church planting families, three families were Americans whose companies had secured housing for them in the village.

Work began to transform a crowd into a community, and my first DMin course proved indispensable. We used materials from that course to develop our corporate understanding of our purpose, values, and vision. We completed not just one, but two Natural Church Development (NCD) surveys over three years to find our minimum factors and begin work to address these areas (gift-orientated ministry and small groups). In that first year, about thirty of our adults covenanted together as a way of formally committing to one another as a church family.

In the years following up to and including the first half of 2006, we labored to put systems in place such that DHVC would be indigenously led and make both American church planting families redundant. Consequently, most of our time and energy was invested in the Leadership Team, Sunday morning worship, youth ministry, and outreach. By the time of our family's departure, much of the skeleton and flesh of these were in place. The Lincolns' departure two years later culminated with the internal hiring of a full-time lead minister (who had been working part-time with youth) and a part-time pastoral worker.

DHVC (June 2011) is in many ways, a typical community of believers who have coalesced around a Sunday morning worship service as the primary locus of their gathering. Most attending and participating in the early days were already followers of Jesus, under-utilized and not developing as disciples in previous church settings. New believers and those yet to choose to follow Jesus were in the minority. The church retains a sense of mission in the village, but changing dynamics in the village and church now has most of the church family residing outside the village. The return of the three American families to the States is one factor. DHVC's current Sunday attendance averages around thirty-five to forty. Since 2008, the church family has continuously supported a "home grown" full-time leader and part time pastoral care worker. However, the full-time minister has recently announced his move to a campus ministry in Birmingham. One cannot help but sense there are significant challenges ahead for DHVC to determine its next steps and missionally engage the community.

Analysis of this season of personal and corporate ministry has resulted in three inter-related observations. It is important to add that it was only after a year's time and an ocean's distance that the shape of these became discernible; it was much longer before they could be described. The first to highlight is the reality that traditional church was the ingrained, default position for most everyone in the church and residents of the growing village, even if no building was associated with DHVC.⁷ For this new spiritual community, despite "efforts" to the contrary, the Sunday morning worship services became the focus of church life. It is too strong a statement to make unequivocally, but at

⁷ Construction of mixed housing began in late 1997. Between 150 and 200 residences were built and occupied by April 1999. Six hundred had been built by October 2001. The original village plans called for 850 residences, and take-up of the property set aside for a church building by occupancy of the 675th residence. Over two thousand residences are now built and occupied. These figures are drawn from personal notes and conversations with developers and village center management over the years.

certain times in the life of DHVC the argument could have been entertained that it was a Sunday worship service which was planted, rather than a church.

Second, and closely related, was a shift in missional focus. For the residents of the village, the lack of an identifiable location for the church was a difficult challenge; it still remains so. That is, rather, it is a difficult challenge for DHVC; the fact the community identified church with an identifiable building, which did not exist in this case, only confirmed the view of church as on the margins of ordinary life. The means to address this moved away from those early ways of helping foster community spirit and neighborliness and working with (young) families in holiday clubs to four quarterly village outreach events.⁸ Without recognizing it at the time, this transition was an inadequate way to address the lack of an incarnational presence. Certain individuals had an incarnational presence; but not the church as a whole. For example, in the case of the Picnic on the Green, what started as a partnership between the church and village residents for the village as a way of building community identity, together, became a service of the church to the community as a way of helping the community identify the church in action. This subtle and almost indiscernible shift made the Picnic on the Green, in the end, unsustainable. This shift also meant the loss of ongoing contact with families with children. While in its first three to four years DHVC thrived with children, it was the fruit from seeds previously sown. The years since have seen a marked decline as these children have grown and little or inadequate intentional effort to connect with young families has been made, though seeds are again being sown in the form of Messy Church.

⁸ These four were a Community Christmas Celebration (December), an annual Picnic on the Green (June), a Village Fête (September), and an Easter-orientated event. While the Picnic, Fête, and Picnic on the Green were set in place, no success was found in implementing a community event around Easter.

A third and final observation to process revolves around an undetected inward focus at the expense of incarnational and missional living. If creating systems to support the programmatic missional approach focused on quarterly events was an emphasis of implementation, no less was the desire to create internal systems in DHVC for growth and life without American leadership. The two DMin classes to that point had shown the deep importance of building internal supporting structures for the life of the church.⁹ One example comes from the NCD surveys, where the minimum factors of gift-orientated ministry and small groups were targeted for improvement (contrary, it must be confessed, to NCD thinking, by using the two to address each other).¹⁰ This was done using Willow Creek's *Network* materials in DHVC's small groups.¹¹ Upon reflection, it is clear that this approach and the *Network* resources increased an internal focus in that they looked to place people in their giftedness within an organizational structure that was focused on servicing itself. Had DHVC continued to grow numerically, this might not have become evident; probably, however, it is one of several factors that became a barrier to growth.

These observations are not to discount the deeply meaningful and rich life the church has experienced together. DHVC remains a sound and fairly healthy church. It is to say, however, that these "prejudices" of approach and implementation, while making

⁹ These were with Terry Walling "Essentials of Personal Renewal: Focusing Your Leadership" and "Essentials of Corporate Revitalization: Refocusing Your Ministry" (DMin seminar, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, June 9-20, 2003), and J. Robert Clinton, "Mining Biblical Insights for Leadership" (DMin seminar, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, October 18-29, 2004).

¹⁰ Natural Church Development identifies eight quality characteristics of a healthy church with the assumption that addressing these characteristics improves church health and allows biotic processes created by God to grow a church. The "minimum factors" are those least healthy areas, which in NCD thinking are addressed by the maximum factor. See Schwarz, *Natural Church Development*, 56-57.

¹¹ Bruce L. Bugbee, Bill Hybels, and Don Cousins, *Network: The Right People, in the Right Places, for the Right Reasons* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).

for a good church, have not yet made a great church if that is measured by missional impact in the community.

The Experience of Rethinking Church: thethirdplace

The period from mid-2006 to mid-2011 features in this final story. This period included a fifteen month furlough in the USA, which brought together four strands of experiences and reflection for action (described in the Introduction, and not repeated here). After returning to the UK in late 2007, and settling back into the family residence in Shirley, an initial foray into a simple church gathering was explored. Subsequently, initial implementation of principles discerned while researching and writing this Final Project were undertaken, including an intentional move to adopt church planting movement / church multiplication movement (CPM/CMM) principles.

"We are finally home again!" Tam and I said to each other on the day of our return to the UK, but a return to what? We had only a very rough image of a new church plant in mind: an Acts 2:42 church; a kind of church family and an experience of church that put belonging before believing and behaving; a church that took discipleship seriously, a simple and reproducible form of church. We had already been praying a few months for God to identify someone with whom we could start these explorations. Within a few days an unchurched married couple of previous acquaintance made contact and we began meeting together. In March 2008 we "soft-launched" thethirdplace in our home on Friday evenings.

After eighteen months we were rejoicing that the constituency of people gathering was substantially different and messier than what we had experienced at DHVC. The twenty-five or so attending at various times to that date all came by word of mouth and personal invitations. Still, an increasing creep of complexity in meeting format, Bible study methods and texts, and teaching and leadership made the group more reliant on us. Yes, the mixture of messy, needy and healthy people were being affirmed and loved, and caring for one another, but it was still essentially attractional, centered on the weekly gathering, and hardly missional. To our chagrin, thethirdplace was hardly reproducible by anyone in the group, even if it was something more than a traditional home group. We were not alone in this, as we observed these characteristics in three house churches with whom we tried to forge a network, but failed. Two of them stopped meeting; the other retains no missional or attractional qualities and is completely inward-focused.

In these last eighteen months, three connectional influences have been helping us develop our understanding and implementation of a simple expression of church. First, Peter Farmer of Mission Britain, a networker and practitioner of simple churches showed up at our door. He introduced us to an active national network experimenting and exploring reproducible forms of simple church. Second, DMin research and experimentation brought me to a better understanding of the role of twos and threes in discipleship relationships. Third, this research led to a desire to understand CPM principles and how the principles might be applied in English culture and the third place. Twelve months ago I participated in a ten week Skype training class with Paul Watson, followed by a CPM conference with Paul and David Watson. In January 2011, several of us (UK-based simple church leaders) asked Paul Watson to coach us in implementation of CPM principles, and this has been taking place monthly since then. Another training conference in May 2011 embedded several principles in practice. We now have three of our third place family preparing to start three Discovery Bible Study (DBS) forms of the third place. Besides these, Tammy and I are coaching three others to start DBSs in other geographical locations in the West Midlands.

This case study shows that no expertise on simple church can be claimed. The experimentation has been a difficult, if liberating learning experience from day one, particularly if taken in aggregate with the other case studies. Three observations are tendered here. The first is that as a leader and church planter steeped in a traditional form of church, making the transition to foster a network of (yet to be realized) reproducing simple churches has required more time and experience than anticipated. My own learned behaviors of inherited forms of church are deep-seated, and will not be laid aside or replaced with other behaviors easily. The creep of complexity into practices may be the enemy of simple, but (for me, at least) a simple form of church has not come without understanding the complexity behind it.¹² For a leader (such as myself) envisioning something out of the ordinary, the rigor and arduous work of "experience, exploration,

¹² That aphorism by Oliver Wendell Holmes fits the situation, "I wouldn't give a fig for simplicity this side of complexity, but I would give my life for simplicity on the other side of complexity." The source is unknown, but Dave Browning identifies the paradox of simplicity as Meyer's Law: "It is a simple task to make things complex, but a complex task to make them simple." Browning, *Deliberate Simplicity*, 32.

reflection, and action," rightly undertaken, does not guarantee arrival at the other side of complexity, but surely cannot happen without it. In this, the (sometimes painful) delay in working out the last two or three years of DMin studies and writing has been instrumental to moving forward. Further, the help of other leaders in a mutual learning community, for coaching and mentoring in principles and practices, has been essential.

A second observation also revolves around this idea of complexity and simplicity, particularly in regard to fostering leadership development in a small group. One of the forty-one leadership "macro lessons" Clinton draws from a study of leadership in the Bible is the "complexity" macro lesson.¹³ He states, "Leadership is complex, problematic, difficult and fraught with risk—which is why leadership is needed."¹⁴ Certainly, this is true, but surely it must also be true that the tendency to recognize only that leadership which navigates people through extreme degrees of complexity is mistaken. As it is, the pool of people who can lead at a complex level (and the number of people who can lead others to lead at this level) is limited. However, leadership in simple or less complex situations is just as necessary and just as needed. Indeed, it is where all leadership begins. Paul Watson's contribution, utilizing the thinking of Chris Anderson and Seth Godin, is helpful at this point. The "long tail of leadership" illustrates the fact that a greater number of people have the capacity to lead small groups of people (tribes) where leadership is

¹³ "Macro Lessons inform our leadership with potential leadership values that move toward the absolute In my study of leadership in the Bible, I have defined a leadership truth continuum which recognizes the difficulty in deriving absolutes but does allow for them." J. Robert Clinton, *Clinton's Biblical Leadership Commentary* (Pasadena: Barnabas Publishing, 1999), 517.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 520.

simpler and less complicated.¹⁵ Personally speaking, unleashing leadership at this level has a very strong appeal.

Third, if it is clear not all institutional Churches are missional, and unfavorably shaped by culture, then such can be said of simple churches. Payne illustrates the former by research he conducted to find distinctives of "missional house churches" in the USA. Of 255 house churches responding to his survey, 146 had at least one baptism in the previous year; 123 had planted at least one (house) church. Combining the two, and using this as the criteria for a "missional" house church, only thirty-three qualified.¹⁶ As to the latter, it can be observed of Western culture that enquiries into "simple explanations of complex systems are in vogue" (hence the appeal of writers such as Malcolm Gladwell).¹⁷ These attempts, and the casting about for simple forms of church, could be symptoms of modernity. Trying to reduce the irreducibly complex, and then slap a name on it, may not be much different than other human attempts to control.

Other Discoveries Gleaned from the Journey

Some final comments can be made to conclude this chapter and lessons drawn from this personal journey into a simple form of church. One readily concurs with

¹⁵ Paul Watson, "The Long Tail of Leadership," <http://www.reachingtheonlinegeneration.com/2009/01/07/the-long-tail-of-leadership/> (accessed June 3, 2011), and Paul Watson, "Church Planting Movements Training Conference – Level 2." See also Godin, *Tribes: We Need You to Lead Us*, and Chris Anderson, *The Long Tail* (London: Random House Business, 2006).

¹⁶ His research further revealed that these thirty-three churches averaged between four and six baptisms in the previous year. Payne, *Missional House Churches*, 58-59, 74-75.

¹⁷ Richard Galant, "The Man Who Can Explain Everything," CNN, <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/OPINION/01/24/gladwell.explain/index.html?hpt=C2> (accessed January 24, 2011). See also George Lings, "Unravelling the DNA of Church: How Can We Know that What Is Emerging Is 'Church'?" *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 6, no. 1 (March 2006): 106.

Willard, who says, "We must flatly say that one of the greatest contemporary barriers to meaningful spiritual formation into Christ-likeness is overconfidence in the spiritual efficacy of 'regular church services.' They are vital, they are not enough, it is that simple."¹⁸ While many would agree that this is applicable to legacy forms of church, it is also valid to say of emerging forms of church, simple church included. Whatever "regular gatherings" a simple church (and network) may have, discipleship as a passive intent is not intentional enough; one does not "drift" into discipleship. It must be deliberate and it must be ongoing, if also flexible and sensitive to a specific individual, family or affinity group's spiritual openness to walking a spiritual journey with Jesus (and with others).

In this, abundant gospel sowing from a methodological base that is both missional and attractional¹⁹ will be seen as a means of initially identifying "people of peace" who want to experience the "belonging" of Christian community without having to "believe" and "behave" according to the expectations of what should be seen in a mature follower of Jesus.²⁰ The identification of these individuals and family groups by church planter(s) and a missional community then enables appropriate relational engagement (discipleship processes). Several have elaborated on Watson's view, noted earlier, about identifying a discipling process in Jesus' ministry; here Bill Hull puts it concisely: "Did Jesus use a

¹⁸ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 249-50.

¹⁹ The focus on being missional (go) does not take away the necessity of the local church being attractive (come) as a countercultural community. See the discussion of this contribution to the current attractional versus missional debate in Murray, *Church Planting*, 11-13.

²⁰ Bounded / centered set thinking originates with Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), see chapter six. See also Alan J. Roxburgh, "Missional Leadership: Equipping God's People for Mission," in *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1998), 201ff., where the focus is on the formation and shape of missional communities. Murray's discussion on belonging, believing, behaving is a must read; see Murray, *Church after Christendom*, 9-38.

specific design or process for developing his most faithful followers?"²¹ These writers credit A.B. Bruce (in an 1871 book) with first observing three specific transitions made by Jesus in this regard. Hull articulates these as four key invitations marking specific transitions when "many" disciples became just a "few" that changed the world. These are "come and see," "come and follow me," "come and be with me," and "remain in me."²²

While some lament can be made for those who are not "selected" for deeper discipleship, the counsel of Willard rings true. "Spiritual leadership is essentially a matter of being able to induct others into the spiritual life and guide their development therein. There are always some who are ready. Attend to them. Endure the others with love and some humor."²³ This focus on abundant gospel sowing, discipleship selection and reproduction must be adopted and utilized in the thirdplace network strategy not only for the eternal benefit of these individuals, families, and groups, and the extension of God's loving rule, but also for the simple practical reality that without self-replicating disciples, there will be no leaders developed, churches planted, and movement generated.

Related to what has preceded, and gleaned from reading, research, writing, and recent experience in trialing the thirdplace is a new understanding of the indispensable necessity of church life at its most basic cellular level. This is reflected in Matt. 18:20:

²¹ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 170. This corresponds to those questions asked by David Watson (noted in Chapter 4; see footnote 46) about what Jesus was "doing" to make disciples and not just what he was "saying."

²² Ibid., 169-85. Very helpful discussions of these "selection" principles are in Jim Belcher, *Deep Church: A Third Way Beyond Emerging and Traditional* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2009), 98-104, and Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 59ff. The most recent edition of Bruce's concepts can be found in Alexander Balmain Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007).

²³ Dallas Willard, "Spirituality and Ministry" (DMin seminar, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, June 17, 2005). "Selected" might not be the best word to use, but there is an example of Jesus doing so with the twelve (Mark 3:14) and the seventy-two (Luke 10:1). There were certainly those who "de-selected" themselves too, as seen in those who departed from Jesus as told in John 6:24-66.

"Whenever two or three of you come together in my name, I am there with you."

Multiple sources identify this element "as the actual primary experience of church,"²⁴ even if the practices of being church at this base experience are wide and varied.²⁵ Here, "God is at the centre," and the church at its simplest is "a locus of mystery"²⁶ where, individually and corporately, "heaven and earth meet."²⁷ There is much activity of the Triune God with men, women, and children here which is not altogether explainable. Nevertheless, it is essential to discipleship that apprentices to Jesus grow in their understanding of experience(s) with God with appropriate and mutual accountability.²⁸

Finally, given this "English" post-modern and post-Christendom context, a blended and experimental approach will be taken to forging a way ahead that will see a contribution to a church planting movement / church multiplication movement in this country. This will include an integration of CPM/CMM elements (Watson and Cole), Fresh Expressions of church for creative access ministries, and a form of simple church. The next chapter goes on to describe the third place conceptually and experientially, before going on to propose this blended strategy.

²⁴ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 46.

²⁵ Examples include Cole, *Church 3.0*, 139-43; Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God*, 49-53; Bergquist and Karr, *Church Turned Inside Out*, 81ff.; Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 9-18, 153-74; Rik Ripken, "Servants in the Crucible: Findings from a Global Study on Persecution and the Implications for Sending Agencies and Sending Churches" (January 2004), <http://public.imb.org/globalresearch/Pages/References.aspx> (accessed January 31, 2011), 38-45.

²⁶ John Drane and Olive M. Fleming Drane, "Breaking Into Dynamic Ways of Being Church," in *Breaking New Ground: The First Scottish Ecumenical Assembly 2001*, ed. Action of Churches Together in Scotland (Dunblane: Action of Churches Together in Scotland, 2001), 150-51.

²⁷ N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian* (London: SPCK, 2006), 112-113. See also 154-55, where Wright adds that Scripture is also one of those places where heaven and earth meet.

²⁸ Drane and Drane, "Breaking Into Dynamic Ways of Being Church," 150-51.

CHAPTER 6

PROPOSING thethirdplace CONCEPT

Kevin Connolly is a BBC correspondent who recently completed a three-year assignment in America. He writes, "When you come to live in America, you are shocked by the familiarity of the unfamiliar And there is something beguiling in that easy familiarity, but something misleading about it too. It tends to blind Europeans, and the British in particular, to any sense of just how foreign a place America can be."¹ As with Connolly's claim, there is something familiar about the kind of church being imagined here, but also something foreign about "being" this kind of church. What follows outlines a tentative proposal for a simple, missional and spiritual community that incarnates the life of Jesus in extending the rule and reign of God, and is directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Cautiously, but optimistically, this chapter will endeavor to describe both the familiar and the foreign of what is and will be thethirdplace and thethirdplace network. While it does so with three years of experimental experience, many details of the way forward are still unclear. It can describe only my best understanding to date of what it

¹ Kevin Connolly, "Kevin Connolly's Guide to American Culture," BBC News, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/9294890.stm (accessed December 20, 2010).

might look like. In that sense, it is intended to be less prescriptive in particulars and more descriptive and open to modification in the light of experience. Hopefully, because of an experiential base and the reflection of previous chapters, what is proposed will provide a solid foundation for continued learning and the formation of a kind of community Jesus blesses and multiplies.

Origin and Observations about the "Third Place" Concept

The concept of "third places" originates with Ray Oldenburg, a sociologist who was the first to describe and deplore the loss of physical locations for the opportunity of informal public life in the (sub)urban planning of America. His early urgency (dating to 1977) to promote third places came from his initial observation that culturally, "We are inadequately equipped even to defend the *idea* of them."² He argues, using "first place" to describe one's home, and one's work location as the "second place," that "third places" are those "inclusive and local" core settings of informal and public gathering places where a person can experience an environment that is "inclusively sociable, offering the basis of community and the celebration of it."³ His campaign for re-creating these places has been accepted socially and commercially, particularly in America.⁴

Michael Frost helpfully summarizes Oldenburg's observations about third places. First, he highlights those observations as to why third places are crucial to a community.

² Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, x. The emphasis is in the original.

³ Ibid., xvii, 14, 16. Oldenburg's *preface*, Introduction, and Part I are a must read for anyone thinking about the nature of church and community.

⁴ Starbucks has been a prime example of adopting Oldenburg's concepts on a commercial basis.

They are distinctive informal gathering places; they make the citizen feel at home; they nourish relationships and a diversity of human contact; they help create a sense of place and community; they invoke a sense of civic pride; they promote companionship; they allow people to relax and unwind after a long day at work; they are socially binding; they encourage sociability instead of isolation; they make life more colorful; and they enrich public life and democracy.⁵

Second, he summarizes those ingredients essential to third places that function well.

They must be free or quite inexpensive; food and drink, though not absolutely essential, are important factors; they must be highly accessible to neighborhoods so that people find it easy to make the place a regular part of their routine; a lot of people should be able to comfortably walk to the place from their home; they should be places where a number of people regularly go on a daily basis; they should be places where a person feels welcome and comfortable, and where it is easy to enter into conversation; and a person should expect to find both old and new friends on each trip to the place.⁶

Some of these elements intersect with the third place concept. At the core, however, is the commitment to restore an essential experience of church that concentrates on being a spiritual and "relational space" (24/7), in contrast to the Church's surrender to modernity in becoming "propositional space" that "specialize[s] in formulating and advancing a better spiritual argument" for an hour on Sunday morning.⁷

The Missional Impetus of the third place

Leonard Sweet objects that "the church has more than enough mission statements and not nearly enough mission relationships and mission movements."⁸ While that is true, it is equally true that it is very helpful to have some clarity of purpose, values, vision,

⁵ Frost, *Exiles*, 56-57.

⁶ Ibid., 57-58.

⁷ Leonard I. Sweet and Edward H. Hammett, *The Gospel According to Starbucks* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2007), 132.

⁸ Ibid., 61.

practices and priorities, and expectations regarding the task at hand. The remainder of this chapter highlights each of these, in turn, as informed by earlier discussion.

The missional impetus of the third place is about the purpose of the third place, stemming from a secure personal and corporate identity centered in Jesus, and the expansion of the Kingdom of God. It has three parts to it as relates to the third place network. Firstly, it adopts the passion of Jesus' mission "to look for and to save people who are lost" (Luke 19:10), and introduce them into an eternal kind of life that transforms them and society (the Gospel of the Kingdom). This dual concern, one, of the reality of sin and separation (lostness) from God, and two, of the outrageous grace available for adoption into God's forever family with others, shows a biblical balance and coherence. It may be the case that individuals and family groups in the modern / post-modern mix respond initially to one or the other (i.e., a sense of personal separation from God or the reality of sin, or a heartfelt ache for Kingdom of God issues like justice and creation care). Nonetheless, this dual concern recognizes the *missio Dei* initiative, but also the necessity of personal and community experience in the reality of lostness and reconciliation with God. Secondly, this missional impetus is to present (or offer) each person and the community of faith to the Father spiritually mature and "completely like" Jesus (Eph. 4:13).⁹ This is the essence of discipleship, where an apprentice's maturity is

⁹ The use of "present" comes from the use of forms of the verb ἵσθμι used by Paul (παρστήσαι in Rom. 12:1, 2 Cor. 11:2 and Col 1:22; παστήσει in 2 Cor. 4:14; παστήσων in Col. 1:28; and παστήσει in Eph. 5:27) and Jude (στήσαι in Jude 24). These passages reflect a) admonitions for followers of Jesus individually and corporately to make themselves entirely and wholly available to God, b) Paul's desire to properly steward his spiritual responsibility before God in bringing the Church to maturity in Christ as his gift of service to Jesus, but also that c) ultimately it is Jesus who is the one who by his reconciling work offers the Church to the Father holy and pure. In modern English use, "offer" may be preferred.

measured by one's following after Jesus who modeled complete reliance on his Father, and who by God's grace is being shaped into his character and life. (Rom. 8:29, 12:2).

Thirdly, this missional impetus includes ministry in the community and coming alongside anyone who promotes the welfare of the community. There is a tension here to acknowledge in what this means and involves. On the one hand, "serving" reflects Jesus' example and call to his disciples to give up the ambition to be first and foremost and serve others.¹⁰ On the other hand, in the British context, "serving" can imply "we have it, you need it" with imperialistic or parochial overtones.¹¹ In this vein, Raymond Fung argues persuasively that "to describe the church as servant to the world is clearly inadequate" and the Church should do away with it and speak of "partnership" as an alternative attitudinal approach.¹² Taken seriously, he maintains that a partnership includes an honest and humble interchange where serving comes as an expression of love and respect: "A partner also serves his or her fellow partners beyond the call of duty as the need arises. In a partnership, one does not serve because one is a servant. One serves because one is not a servant. And the service is that much more meaningful and treasured precisely because it is not the service of servants but the service of equals."¹³

Without attempting to resolve this tension, it can simply be stated that acts of loving service, without condition and without paternalistic intent, demonstrate a

¹⁰ "If you want to be first, you must be the slave of the rest. The Son of Man did not come to be a slave master, but a slave who will give his life to rescue many people" (Matt. 20:27-28). See also Mark 9:35, 10:44-43, Matt. 23:11, 1 Cor. 9:19, and Phil. 2:7.

¹¹ John Drane, e-mail comment, Birmingham, UK, March 31, 2011.

¹² Raymond Fung, *The Isaiah Vision: An Ecumenical Strategy for Congregational Evangelism* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1992), 33.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 35.

willingness to set aside one's individualistic personal agenda to honor Jesus and express care for and with others.¹⁴ One byproduct of doing so is being further shaped into the life and character of Jesus. Taken together, these three elements are evidenced in Jesus' summation of the commands of the Old Testament (Matt. 22:37-39, Mark 12:29-31, Luke 10:27). For the third place, these three elements can tentatively be summarized as "Love God. Love one another as you love yourself. Serve in the community." The effect of this kind of missional community should be such that when people "see Jesus as he is, [they] must turn away or else shamelessly adore him."¹⁵

The Values of the third place

Whereas missional impetus is about identity and purpose, values are about guiding principles.¹⁶ These guiding principles are the underlying assumptions and beliefs that guide decision-making and behavior, and can be described or delineated in several ways. "Actual" values are reflected in actual behavior; "preferred" values are those values desired but not consistently reflected in ongoing behavior. "Foundational" values are those values that reflect "being" (the kind of spiritual community we are / will be) and

¹⁴ See Matt. 10:38, 16:24-25; Mark 8:34; and Luke 9:23-24, 14:27. There is insufficient space here to explore the paradoxical truth of how a person (or a community) becomes more fully what God intends when that person (or community) chooses to lay down one's wants, wishes and desires and exchanges them for what God wants for all those who accept his loving reign. This is reflected in the comment by Dallas Willard that "God's intent for each of us is that we should grow to the point where he can empower us to do what we want" because we increasingly want what God does that still reflects our own uniqueness. Dallas Willard, "Spirituality and Ministry" (DMin seminar, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, June 6, 2005).

¹⁵ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 19.

¹⁶ This discussion of values relies on insights from Terry Walling. See Terry Walling, *Focused Ministry Resource Kit* (Carol Stream: ChurchSmart Resources, 1999), Summit #1: Assessing, 9-10; Summit #2, 9; and Terry Walling "Essentials of Personal Renewal: Focusing Your Leadership" and "Essentials of Corporate Revitalization: Refocusing Your Ministry" (DMin seminar, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, June 9-20, 2003).

remain constant, while "ministry" values characterize the "how" of doing ministry and can change over time. "Core" values are those shared assumptions of a group jointly held. While acknowledging these differentiations, the discussion which follows will focus only on foundational and ministry values.

Foundational Values

Foundational values represent the essential values of the thirdplace and the thirdplace network. These express the kind of community and network the thirdplace will be. They are also core values to the extent that community members adopt and jointly own, share, and shape them in practice. These are modeled by the early church, especially in Acts 2:42-47. Ideally, an expanding base of people will have these as actual values, insofar as "discipleship is the alignment of actual values" with those of Jesus.¹⁷

We Are Centered on Jesus Christ

Jesus is the center of the thirdplace. He is both Lord and Savior. He is author and finisher of our faith. He fulfills his promise to be present whenever the thirdplace meets, in whatever fashion and in whatever numbers. The significance of the incarnation, his death, and his resurrection brings expressions of gratitude, worship, and service. We listen to him so that we can lovingly obey him just as he lovingly obeyed his Father.

We Read the Bible to Hear God's Voice

The Bible is an incredible collection of stories of God's self-revelation and interaction with his human creation. It breathes throughout with the anticipation and

¹⁷ Walling, *Focused Ministry Resource Kit*, Summit #1, Assessing, 9.

fulfillment of God's redemptive plan and intention for a people who live and express his Kingdom values. Whatever the thirdplace network does or does not do must be consistent with the Bible. In it, we discover how to exercise faith that pleases God. We discover truth and grace in the person of Jesus, his loving obedience and reliance on the Father, and the experiential promise and presence of the Holy Spirit. Together, we also discover from the experiences of the people of the Bible with God, with one another, and with their world that we can discern and experience his speaking to us as his church today.¹⁸

We Work at Community

Jesus brought the Church into being. He loves the Church, and intended for this community to be united and interdependent. Growth and maturity comes through loving one another in conflict and in peace. Authentic and transparent lives require proximity, time, and appropriate accountability. Care and provision for one another's needs and a place to exercise spiritual gifts brings community and fulfillment.

We Eat Meals Together

Jesus gathered with his followers around meals, he engaged with potential followers around meals, and the early church met in each other's homes around meals. He gifted the Church with a simple celebration of eating bread and drinking wine as a centering act of worship and thanksgiving. The practice of both brings a sense of family. The simple rhythm of gathering together weekly (and more) around a shared table enables the possibility of deeper intimacy.

¹⁸ "Our humanity will not by itself prevent us from knowing and interacting with God just as they did." Dallas Willard, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 35. The original is emphasized. See his important discussion on this pp. 30-40.

We Pray Together

Every individual and community in the Bible which influenced God's people towards God's purposes demonstrated reliance on the Father. Jesus modeled this kind of life. Humility in prayer provides opportunity to hear the Holy Spirit not only for personal direction and guidance, but for missional outreach and activity. The power is not in prayer, as such, but in the Triune God and the authentic spiritual authority which comes from being abandoned to God together.

Discipleship is Loving Obedience to All of Jesus' Commands

Following Jesus is not a passive activity. In baptism an immersion into a covenant of loving obedience to all of Jesus' commands is agreed. Loving obedience to Jesus is worship. Fully following after Jesus in a manner such as he relied on the Father is risky. Loving obedience to Jesus in a mysterious act of grace brings the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit.¹⁹ While the Holy Spirit empowers the fulfillment of obedient acts and actions, both the community and an individual must decide to follow Jesus wherever he leads, discovering and responding to all those things which Jesus asks.

Ministry Values

Ministry values represent the way the third place will faithfully follow Jesus as a spiritual and missional community. Again, these are core values to the extent that

¹⁹ No sense of "obligating" God to impart his Holy Spirit is implied, only the sense that God keeps his promises. Language limits one's ability to express it, but it is worth noting the biblical tension: Jesus says the Father is "ready to give the Holy Spirit to anyone who asks" (Luke 11:13), while the first disciples declare from their experience that the Holy Spirit is "God's gift to everyone who obeys God" (Acts 5:32). Space does not allow for a more complete study of the relationship between the experience and gift of the Holy Spirit and a disciple's or church's obedience.

increasing ownership and adoption of these values by those who become part of the community are shared by the community. Among the thethirdplace community, people will act (or not) along a range or continuum between actual and preferred values.

Simple and Reproducible

Simple practices of church, discipleship, and leadership do not in themselves guarantee reproducibility in any of them. Still, the introduction of complexity, however layered or nuanced becomes a barrier to actual practice and spiritual and numerical growth. If the practices and systems of thethirdplace are simple, it is more likely they will be reproducible. If they are not reproducible, then apart from issues of (dis)obedience or lack of intentionality, it is likely they are too complicated. Church planting or church multiplication movements (CPM/CMM) are not fostered by complexity, so we will ruthlessly seek simplicity.²⁰

Missional and Attractional

As a network, thethirdplace will not fall into a trap that artificially separates the "go" and "come" nature of the gospel of the Kingdom of God. A spiritual community that is lovingly obedient to Jesus is rightly outward focused and attractive.²¹ Together and as a network, thethirdplace will incarnationally enter community and family groups as the

²⁰ Research showing a direct relationship between simplicity and reproducibility cannot be located, but ample anecdotal evidence can be found showing complexity limits reproducibility. See, for instance, the discussion in Browning, *Deliberate Simplicity*, 22-64. He offers the important proviso regarding the need for intentionality, "Just because something is designed to be simple doesn't mean it will fulfill its intended purpose. This is why we have to be deliberate." Ibid., 34. Ranier and Geiger demonstrate from their research that minimizing complexity for a simple discipleship process is more effective and reproducible in program-based American churches. See Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 2006).

²¹ Murray, *Church Planting*, 11-13.

hands and feet of Jesus, but will also create opportunities for being community that are more attractively-based.²²

Twos and Teams²³

The health of any church is directly tied to its most basic cellular expression. Discipleship is more effective at the "two or three" level, as is leadership development. Modeling processes for passing on skills and instilling values, if not duplicated and reproduced here, will not likely be duplicated and reproduced at any other level. This is also the base level of a team, where synergistic processes have the potential to multiply effectiveness and fruitfulness. These processes for effectiveness and fruitfulness are further enhanced by leadership teams which include the full biblical scope of apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers.²⁴

Belonging and Believing and Behaving

People do not come to follow Jesus and enter into life with him in a neat and linear process. The interplay between these elements is simultaneously human and divine, mysterious even. Some people "behave" (that is, act upon the Gospel commands before believing them) their way into the Kingdom. Some people are loved into the Kingdom. A

²² "Every regular was once a newcomer, and the acceptance of newcomers is essential to the sustained vitality of the third place." See Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, 34.

²³ The terminology here is still under consideration. Alternatively, "Twos and Threes" or "Triads and Teams" may express the values being exercised. See the discussion in Chapter 5, especially footnote 25, regarding the crucial role of twos and threes.

²⁴ David Gergen quotes the aphorism, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." Tony Morgan, "Top 11 Leadership Challenges," *TonyMorganLive*, <http://tonymorganlive.com/2009/08/09/top-11-leadership-challenges/> (accessed February 1, 2011). See Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 149-77, for elaboration on these five functional roles and relationships for missional effectiveness.

few even "believe" themselves into the Kingdom.²⁵ As a spiritual community, however, we will prioritize creating a sense of belonging modeled on Romans 15:7, give space and time for people to process the gospel as experience and as content prior to a commitment to follow Jesus, and assist in each person's integration of behavior appropriate to their discipleship.²⁶ Projects of service and care with and for others will also provide a "behaving" component that models the activity of Jesus even if Jesus is not yet followed as Lord or embraced as Savior. The messiness of this will be accepted even while the invitation to follow Jesus is offered consistently and lovingly in word and deed.²⁷

The Vision of the third place

From this missional impetus (purpose and identity) and corresponding values flows a vision for God's unique destiny and role for the third place and the third place network. George Barna writes that vision should be understood "as a clear mental image of a preferable future imparted by God to His chosen servants and is based upon an accurate understanding of God, self, and circumstances."²⁸ This in part mirrors Terry Walling's observations where he roots God's divine intent for the future in a leader's past: "Based upon how God has shaped you in the past, what do you believe God is calling you

²⁵ C.S. Lewis seems to be an example of this. See C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (London: G. Bles, 1955).

²⁶ "Embrace one another, just as Jesus embraced you; this is to God's glory" (personal translation).

²⁷ The reality of sorting out this messiness ultimately remains in God's hands. Jesus unhesitatingly calls for discipleship that is internally and externally aligned with God's will. The story of the sheep and goats is one example (Matt. 25:31-46) while his challenge at the end of the Sermon on the Mount is especially strong (Matt. 7:21-23; see also Matt. 12:46-50). Jesus' story of the wheat and tares (Matt. 13:29-31) also seems to bring a message of patience with the messiness confident of a right and proper reckoning.

²⁸ George Barna, *The Power of Vision: How You Can Capture and Apply God's Vision for Your Ministry* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1992), 28.

to be and to do for His glory?" Walling also cites Bill Hybels' definition that vision is a "picture of the future that produces passion in you."²⁹ Barna makes the claim that only leaders receive and can be trusted with vision, but this seems inordinately strong and exclusivistic.³⁰ It seems better to qualify this claim by noting Walling's view that vision unfolds over time as an individual (and community) responds to God in loving obedience.³¹ To this sentiment Barna agrees, saying "Vision for ministry relates to the state of your heart and your willingness to commit every resource at your disposal to His service."³² The implication is that as one walks a path of loving discipleship, God illuminates enough of the pathway ahead to take the next step (Psalm 119:105, KJV), and any vision "statement" therefore can only be one's (or a community's) best understanding to date. In reference to the thirdplace network (and as personal understanding of vision), vision is that understanding of God's preferred future for local communities of the thirdplace and the thirdplace network that simultaneously "thrills to death" and "scars to death."³³ That is, this vision should both captivate one's attention and passion, but require partnership with God and his activity to bring to reality.

One final question regarding vision from Walling provides a time frame, in considering this preferred future: "What is God calling us to accomplish in the near

²⁹ Walling, "Essentials of Personal Renewal." The quote from Hybels has no citation for its source.

³⁰ John Drane responds to this by saying, "I think it works the other way around – those with a vision emerge as leaders." John Drane, e-mail comment, Birmingham, UK, June 30, 2011.

³¹ Walling, "Essentials of Personal Renewal."

³² Barna, *The Power of Vision*, 14-15, 28, 30.

³³ This is a personal description of those aspects of vision which create personal passion and excitement to engage one's entire being in making the vision a reality, but also a healthy and necessary self-understanding of one's inadequacy for which God is ultimate resource.

future?"³⁴ It is generally observed that people tend to "overestimate what can be done in one year and underestimate what can be done in three." This, and given considerations of CPM principles, such a time frame seems sensible, and will be adopted here. Finally, this vision statement takes into account the insights of Neil Cole and Malcolm Gladwell (and many others) regarding the nature of decentralized social networks.³⁵ These factors, all together, combine to frame this statement as my (our) best understanding to date of God's unique destiny and role for thethirdplace and thethirdplace network:

Our deep desire is to see many new apprentices to Jesus such that individuals, communities, and Western society are transformed and the Kingdom of God is experienced on earth and especially in the United Kingdom. We want to participate in this work of God in the form of a church planting / church multiplication movement, such that disciples reproduce themselves, leaders multiply leaders, and churches plant reproducing churches. In the West Midlands, this will take the form by the end of 2014 as an embryonic and expanding collection of up to fifteen simple churches, relating together as thethirdplace network, and as one network of several in the Fellowship of Churches of Christ.

Practices and Priorities of thethirdplace

At the core of this vision is a desire to foster and contribute to a movement of new disciples, leaders and churches in the UK. While there are many churches and networks making significant contributions to each of these elements, as far as one can tell no church planting / church multiplication movement can be ascertained anywhere in the UK. For this reason, it seems necessary to highlight practices and priorities which must

³⁴ Walling, "Essentials of Personal Renewal."

³⁵ Cole, *Church 3.0*, 137-62 for the full discussion, but especially 148-50; and Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2000), 169-92. See also Ori Brafman and Rod A. Beckstrom, *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations* (New York: Portfolio, 2006).

be unwaveringly applied in these early days in order to foster conditions that may yield fruitfulness later on. These practices and priorities are five in number.

Abundant Gospel Sowing

This is the practice of casting gospel "seed" (the gospel of the Kingdom of God) liberally and often, so as to find soil where the gospel can take root (Matt. 13:1-23). Using both attractional and missional methods, the purpose is to find people of peace with whom forms of Discovery Bible Studies (DBS) can be initiated. If the thirdplace community fails to do so liberally, consistently, and persistently, these men, women, and children will not be identified. This will require some experimentation to determine those methods which are best suited to those currently in the thirdplace and which can be conducted in a culturally appropriate manner and are more organic than programmatic.³⁶

Networks of Relationships

Identifying individuals who are receptive to considering the story of Jesus must avoid the common practice of extracting these persons from their natural social networks. Instead, working with people of peace within their existing spheres of relationships is the more effective and sustainable route to proceed. The practice of introducing DBSs and new expressions of the thirdplace will focus on doing so within natural networks of relationships. There are no predispositions to one culture or ethnicity within Shirley, Solihull, or the West Midlands. On the one hand, wherever people of peace provide entry

³⁶ As a reminder, Gospel "seed" here is the gospel of the Kingdom of God which is cast about by story (personal and gospel stories of experience with Jesus), acts of care and concern, events, incarnational living, and any other means whereby people are engaged in conversation and consideration of the life and manner of Jesus. The relevant sections of Chapter 4 provide the background discussion for this practice.

into these relational networks, then that will be pursued. On the other hand, access to these communities within a community will be prayerfully and strategically engaged.

Discipleship Selection

Having observed Jesus' method in the gospels, in which he moved from the many to the few so that the few could be discipled into influencing the many, the third place network will unabashedly practice the same. Obedience to Jesus and gospel principles will provide the filter and highlight those individuals and groups with which to invest time and energy in forms of coaching and mentoring.³⁷ While a sense of sadness, grief and disappointment will be experienced regarding those who do not want to follow after Jesus, as a practice we will move on to individuals and relational networks who want assistance in exploring discipleship.

Discipleship as Action-Reflection

It is recognized that those who engage in teaching, training, discipling, and leading others receive the most benefit from preparations and the respective activity which is undertaken. The observations of David Browning are relevant here, when he describes discipleship and leadership deployment in Christ the King Community Church:

[As a church] we have a predisposition toward action. We have not thought our way into a new way of acting; we have acted our way into a new way of thinking. The action-reflection learning model contends that action is the starting point for reflection and therefore fundamental to the learning process Our leadership development process is IDTS (identify, deploy, train, support) instead of ITDS (identify, train, deploy, support).³⁸

³⁷ Coaching and mentoring are here considered as aspects of discipleship, but with coaching focused on skills for effectiveness and mentoring focused on personal development. This is opposite the usual way these are used and understood in the UK educational and commercial world.

³⁸ Browning, *Deliberate Simplicity*, 161-62.

Likewise, thethirdplace will adopt this practice which is a kind of "just in time" form of training and support. By getting people "in the game" early with only the essential minimum of information required, coaching and mentoring can be targeted and avoid needless wasting of time and energy.

Decentralized and Distributed Leadership

The study of networks and movements shows that reproduction and multiplication require a different kind of systems and leadership thinking. Flat, rather than hierarchical structures offer opportunity for chaos, but also creativity in discipleship and leadership. Catalyzing movements requires more than a centralized network around a charismatic leader. In thethirdplace network, leadership will be given away as each disciple of Jesus mutually responds to the leadership of Jesus.

The Expectations of thethirdplace

Appropriate accountability can be formal and / or informal between individuals and local expressions of thethirdplace. The Bible provides examples of covenantal relationships at multiple levels. While not fully developed or explored here, formal and informal expressions of these covenant relationships can be fashioned for groups of twos or threes (such as Cole's Life Transformation Groups), local gatherings of thethirdplace, and between local gatherings of thethirdplace which make up thethirdplace network.³⁹

³⁹ More on Life Transformation Groups is found in the following chapter, but see Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God*, 63ff.

PART THREE

A STRATEGY FOR PLANTING thethirdplace network OF REPRODUCING CHURCHES

CHAPTER 7

PLANNING AND GOALS NECESSARY FOR PLANTING A REGIONAL NETWORK OF thethirdplace

If "being strategic means having a carefully devised plan of action to achieve a goal," then Part Three must present an implementable plan that can be measured for fruitfulness and effectiveness.¹ It can only do so, however, with two primary assumptions. First, there is the assumption that much can be done on the human level. The second follows on by acknowledging that whatever is done on the human level amounts to nothing without it being a response to God's initiative, direction, and ongoing partnership, either generally or in specific instances (Matt. 7:21ff. and John 15:5). Given this understanding in the context of a post-Christendom, post-modern environment, a challenge arises insofar as "strategic planning" is borrowed from the business world as a modernistic practice.² Graham Cray argues that this challenge comes because, in a new paradigm of discontinuous change and unpredictability, "strategic planning is

¹ Browning, *Deliberate Simplicity*, 45.

² Alan Roxburgh similarly challenges leaders who fail to release the missional imagination of the Church (the work of God's Spirit in the Church for God's future): "Every strategic plan, every mission and vision statement, every church health program is another means of telling the ordinary people of God that they need to get the advice and direction of experts to understand what God is up to." Alan J. Roxburgh, "Releasing Missional Imagination," *RUNway Magazine* (May 2009), 5.

undermined" and "prediction based on previous experience is no longer trustworthy."³

This could be phrased as a kind of conundrum: "How does one strategically plan organic growth?" If organic growth by its very nature has an "out of control" element, planning to control it seems not just counter-productive, but silly.

This is not to say there is nothing one can do. Rather, it is to put what one can do in perspective. The aim of this chapter is to describe the hard work of human effort which must be done but will not be sufficient in and of itself to bring the transforming Reign of God. It understands that one must strategically plan in order to bring a vision of a preferable future into being, but that God may reveal he has something different in mind which only becomes clear as one implements a plan. It agrees with Mike Bonem that "the 'best practices' from business have much to offer regarding decision making, but they omit the greatest asset available to congregational leaders—the promptings of the Holy Spirit," and seeks to put hearing from God as primary to the task.⁴ This aim is summed up in selected sentences from the opening pages of John Taylor's *The Go-Between God*:

The chief actor in the historic mission of the Christian church is the Holy Spirit. He is the director of the whole enterprise. The mission consists of the things that he is doing in the world. In a special way it consists of the light that he is focussing upon Jesus Christ. [The disciples] must *not* go it alone. They must *not* think that the mission was their responsibility. They were not invited to deploy their resources or plan their strategy. The very mandate to engage in this world-wide mission could only be given simultaneously with the gift of the Holy Spirit. How could it have been otherwise, seeing that Jesus himself received his mandate and his sense of mission only by being caught up into the operation of the Holy Spirit and dominated by him? If for Jesus himself both messiahship and mission were derived from his self-immersion in that floodtide of the Holy Spirit, how

³ Graham Cray, "Discernment: The Key to Contextual Church Planting" (presentation at the Mission21 church planters conference, Bath, UK, November 18, 2009).

⁴ Mike Bonem, "Good to Great to Godly," *Leadership* (April 5, 2010), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/communitylife/visiondirection/goodgreatgodly.html> (accessed April 7, 2010).

could his followers possibly be involved in that same mission except through the same immersion?⁵

Having acknowledged these tensions, what follows in this chapter is an attempt to describe in a broad and basic outline those essential strategic practices that will enable hearing from God, identify men and women of peace, make disciples, develop leaders, and multiply the third place. These focus on what can be done on the human level, leaving as best as is possible to God only what he can do.

Setting Appropriate Goals to Plant a Simple Church Network

It has already been noted that a vision to participate in a church planting and church multiplication movement in England holds sway over this strategy. The view has been taken that planting a network of simple churches linked to the Fellowship of Churches of Christ can play a catalyzing role in this vision.⁶ Here, the third place in its "ideal" mature form is a kind of simple ecclesial community which is missionally engaged in local settings, but also regionally and nationally linked with the Fellowship. The best understanding to date of the part the third place has in this vision imagines an embryonic network of fifteen simple and missional churches by year's end 2014, with some 150 people active in local expressions of the third place and linked into the network.⁷

⁵ John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission* (London: S. C. M. Press, 1975), 3-4. The emphasis is Taylor's.

⁶ Practicing the principles outlined in this chapter may catalyze other similar networks, but that remains outside the scope of this project. The pursuit to understand and practice these principles has already brought ongoing contact with other simple church networks for strategizing, training, and catalyzing. See www.missionbritain.com, www.simplechurch.co.uk, and www.simplestories.co.uk.

⁷ Based on limited recent experience, it seems reasonable to estimate an average or optimum size of ten to fifteen, but it is difficult to make any firm estimates. Cole's concept of a family group of twelve to fifteen is helpful here; see Cole, *Church 3.0*, 138-47. See also Victor Choudhrie, regarding his view that ten is optimal, from his experience leading a CPM in India, in Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 260-61.

This goal (in the human realm) relies entirely on intermediate steps or practices. As such, these fifteen local expressions of the third place will only arise from, and be supplemented by a host of groups (of twos, threes, and more) that are forms of, or using methods akin to Discovery Bible Studies (DBS) or Life Transformation Groups (LTG). The initiation and multiplication of these kinds of groups (described later in this chapter) is integral to the strategy; they are the necessary building blocks to making disciples, developing leaders, and the planting of additional third places.

Progressions or stages of development within this framework are to be prayerfully expected. DBSs and LTGs and their like can morph into spiritual community, into church, and into missional community that is simple and organic in each expression. These stages may happen quickly and simultaneously, or incrementally but non-linearly. In similar fashion to those values practiced whenever a form of the third place meets (Scripture, community, breaking bread, and prayer), it makes no difference the order or proportion of progression, only that they happen and can be measured in some way.

For the purposes of this strategy, any gathering or community where it is intended that Jesus will be the center of attention can be tentatively identified as "the third place." This view accepts the promise of Jesus found in Matt. 18:20 that "whenever two or three of you come together in my name, I am there with you." There are no membership requirements, boundaries are fuzzy, affinities are organic, and invitations to take part common.⁸ The focus, however, is always on Jesus, and always includes a call to lovingly

⁸ No one is unwelcome to participate in any gathering of the third place. The opposite is true as a prior decision has been made to embrace in welcome based on Romans 15:7 and the values noted in the previous chapter. If people move in and out of local third place communities, all other things being well, it will be more a reflection of a person's discipleship as he or she chooses to participate, or not. Some will be like those who departed Jesus in John 6:66; others will be seeking a different means of discipleship growth.

obey Jesus (that is, follow Jesus and learn to rely on Father God as he did).⁹ This focus is appropriately fostered by a facilitator or leader or church planter (understood in the most basic sense of anyone who gathers a new community of people with Jesus at the center). This person, over time, will also engage this community in exploring purpose, values and vision. Some of these communities will consequently identify themselves as part of the thirdplace network; others may choose not to be part of the network.

These elements alone do not make an expression of the thirdplace a missional community in its most mature form, or one among the goal of fifteen. It is only when those who begin to call the thirdplace their spiritual home, the majority of those participating in life together demonstrate loving obedience to Jesus in baptism, and add a communion meal to the breaking of bread together, that progression into something akin to church as described in Acts 2.42-47 takes place.¹⁰ When this community also becomes personally engaged in missional activity (sowing the gospel, looking for people of peace, and serving the community in addition to one another), then a mature and missional expression of the thirdplace can be ascertained, and it will be counted among the fifteen.

This discussion suggests adopting three categories for monitoring and measuring progression. First are forms of DBSs which will be categorized as such. A second will show that movement to something more akin to simple church is being experienced, so the category "thirdplace DBS" will be used. A third category, "thirdplace" will be

⁹ The reader can refer back to Chapter 4 and the section "Basic Discipleship and Leadership Characteristics in the New Testament with a Focus on Reproduction" for the justification behind the use of the term "loving obedience" as an alternate form for following, trusting, and being apprenticed to Jesus.

¹⁰ A personal working definition of church was determined in an earlier chapter: "A church is a spiritual family of apprentices dedicated in baptism to Jesus and devoted to lovingly obey him in all things, gifted with his presence and power by the Holy Spirit, who gather in worship around the Lord's table and scatter in service to bring the Father's Kingdom values to all peoples everywhere."

used for mature and missional expressions. Adopting these categories is a tentative step, because doing so may introduce complexity in measurement that may be a hindrance rather than a help.

Finally, it can be envisioned that the actual number of people involved in the network will be greater than 150 people in fifteen gatherings of the third place. Forms of DBSs will include many more people if the three year goal is to be realized. Appropriate coaching and mentoring of new leaders will be essential, and it is not expected there will be anything clean and tidy about these processes and developments. It will be messy and chaotic. It is possible, however, to ask certain questions to measure individual and group organic growth toward this mature missional community. These are reserved for the next chapter and will bear in mind the earlier discussions of church and discipleship.

A Focus on Hearing God (Prayer) and Joining His Work as a Foundational Strategy

The vision of a CPM/CMM and fifteen simple churches serves to "keep the end in mind," which is the second of Stephen Covey's seven habits of highly effective people. This habit, he explains, is "based on the principle that all things are created twice. There is a mental (first) creation, and a physical (second) creation."¹¹ Of course, this practice of beginning with the end in mind depends entirely on grasping God's preferred future for the third place and the third place network. This section outlines a plan to build a foundational predisposition in all that the third place is and does to hear from God and to earnestly seek him to do what human efforts cannot. It works from the macro to the micro. First is the marshalling of prayer support internationally and domestically in both

¹¹ Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Restoring the Character Ethic* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 99.

an organic and more programmatic fashion. Second is a description of prayer practices in the thirdplace network. Third are those prayer practices experienced and modeled personally. It is also to be understood that expressions of love and reliance on God in prayer run throughout the life of the thirdplace network even if not mentioned explicitly.

There are two constituencies from which to recruit and mobilize intercessory prayer. An already well-established e-mail list of 800 prayer supporters exists among the Aho family's personal support base, ranging from those who receive prayer updates and pray daily to those who only read for information and rarely pray for the thirdplace. This base has great potential for more specific and direct intercessory prayer, but utilizing this resource has been limited by personal time constraints. In addition to this, there is a much smaller, unorganized, and less informed group amongst the Fellowship and the Church Planting Task Group constituencies. Again, recruitment and essential information to elicit their intercessory prayer has been limited by time constraints of leaders. Annually, about 125 people combined from both constituencies participate in an international prayer vigil for church planting in Great Britain by the Fellowship.

One goal in 2011 will be to increase the level of ongoing prayer from these two constituencies. It is time to take this challenge seriously and prayerfully recruit an administrator for each of these two groups, one stateside, and one for the UK. Types of prayer practices which will be organized include international prayer vigils and a monthly diary of people praying and fasting daily. This can include recruiting teams of prayer intercessors from within and outside the country for prayer events and prayerwalking.¹²

¹² Steven C. Hawthorne and Graham Kendrick, *Prayer-Walking: Praying On-site with Insight* (Orlando: Creation House, 1993) is a resource to consider for those not acquainted with this practice.

Prayer practices within local gatherings of the third place and the third place network will be crucial, as this represents the "on the ground" and "on the coalface" ministry and missional engagement. Apart from prayer within local gatherings of the third place family, more missionally-orientated approaches will be implemented. These include using maps of Shirley and the West Midlands for prayer, identifying places within these maps for prayerwalking, conducting "houses of prayer" nights and prayer vigils, and praying Luke 10:2b in Life Transformation Groups. This may well include identifying or recruiting a prayer leader for the third place network. In all of this, the focus is not on spiritual warfare as such, though spiritual warfare will be expected. In addition, a local pastor (chairman of Shirley Churches Together) has already been approached to discuss a plan to gather local church leaders and prayer teams to identify and pray for local community groups and relational networks.

Personal prayer practices on my part are as front line as it gets. Randy Ferguson points out how Jesus modeled prayer by praying "about, in front of, for, and with" his disciples.¹³ All those practices mentioned in the paragraphs above and below will be grounded in personal experience and modeled for group practice. Quarterly retreats and the classical spiritual disciplines will be essential. Finally, a thirty day (one person a day) prayer network already established will be encouraged to grow organically by asking each person to likewise pray daily for thirty people monthly.¹⁴

¹³ Randy Ferguson, "Prayer in the Making of the Disciples," North American Mission Board, <http://www.churchplantingvillage.net/churchplantingvillagepb.aspx?pageid=8589990307> (accessed February 16, 2011).

¹⁴ Watson, "Church Planting Essentials - Prayer."

A Focus on Abundant Gospel Sowing

Loving and obedient discipleship under Jesus' leadership is the foundation of abundant gospel sowing. The purpose of abundant gospel sowing is to identify people of peace and begin forms of DBSs. The search for these people of peace may come from obedience to Jesus' instructions in Scripture in a general sense, or may come from listening prayer, both undergirded by the foundation in intercessory prayer just described. In either case, it is prayerfully anticipated that there will be serendipitous encounters with people of peace who stumble across the Kingdom without looking for it (treasure) and those who are earnestly seeking the Kingdom (pearl), who, in either case give up all they have to gain it (Matt. 13:44-46).

In a general sense, this abundant gospel sowing will involve, given English culture, a blend of attractional and missional methods.¹⁵ Some of this will involve "access ministries" (those activities of care and creative engagement in order to gain entry into networks of relationships previously unavailable).¹⁶ In this respect, plans are underway to field test a young adult / university age version of the third place called "the talking place." A family-friendly version called "the messy place" (modeled after Messy Church, but in a simple church form) is already being trialed. Under consideration for implementation later in the year is a version of Café Church called "the third place café," either using those

¹⁵ Laurence Singlehurst's visual portrayal of the relational bridge and sowing processes is a helpful view if applied more organically as suggested here. Singlehurst, *Sowing, Reaping, Keeping*, 24-26, 54-59.

¹⁶ Paul Watson, "Making Disciples that become Movements." There is some mixing here between these as kinds of "access ministry" and also as forms of DBS. This reflects an experimental approach during 2011 to ascertain what helps identify people of peace and create small learning communities that enable discipleship relationships. See Watson's Leadership Development Pyramid later in this chapter.

materials already created for this format,¹⁷ or using Paul Griffith's "Table Talk" materials.¹⁸ The Essence Course and the Alpha Course are other resources to use in this regard.¹⁹ There are a variety of other approaches which can be described as "creative listening events."²⁰ Of course, these do not include the potential of social media and social events for access and networking, and these will require a closer look later in 2011.

Listening prayer is integral to this strategy, and the practice is indispensable in all forms of the third place and all levels of sowing, identifying people of peace, initiating forms of DBSs and LTGs, selecting disciples, and developing leaders. In terms of abundant gospel sowing, personal and group experimentation with "treasure hunts" will be utilized as a way of finding persons of peace. Kevin Dedmon describes the hearing of "clues" ("words of knowledge" individually and as a community) and searching together for "treasure" (people) as a treasure hunt. The purpose of listening prayer in the form of a treasure hunt is to have "supernatural encounters with the people whom the Father has already prepared for a divine appointment, and [to whom] the Holy Spirit will guide us toward in order to reveal the truth of Jesus Christ."²¹ Research conducted among Muslim background believers indicates that God has used a combination of the supernatural (signs, miracles and dreams), the Bible, and a local believer or near-culture Christian to

¹⁷ This fresh expression of church has become highly developed for approved use in high street coffee shops in England. See <http://www.cafechurch.net/>.

¹⁸ These materials are available from <http://www.table-talk.org/>.

¹⁹ An intro to Essence can be found at <http://www.sharetheguide.org/discipleship/resources/02>, and is now available for free download at <http://www.sharejesusinternational.com/resources/essence/>.

²⁰ Examples are regularly described in Chris Duffett's blog at <http://duffett.wordpress.com>. See also Chris Duffett, *Smack Heads and Fat Cats* (Malton, North Yorkshire: Gilead Books, 2009).

²¹ Kevin Dedmon, *The Ultimate Treasure Hunt: A Guide to Supernatural Evangelism Through Supernatural Encounters* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Pub., Inc., 2007), 17-18.

call them to himself.²² Surely, God can put lovingly obedient followers of Jesus who practice listening prayer in the proximity of people he is calling to himself. Granted, this approach is outside the experience and comfort zone of most apprentices to Jesus (myself included), but is worth experimentation in the anticipation that persons of peace will be identified.

Not to be discounted, of course, are those forms of abundant Gospel sharing which must be embedded as essential missional DNA in the life of the thirdplace family and expressions of the thirdplace. One would be acts of service (including those in partnership with others) that meet local individual and community needs. Another would be the natural but intentional sharing of Bible stories encountered in the thirdplace with the sphere of social relationships of which each person is a part, or in a more risky but culturally contextualized fashion with strangers. Both of these will need appropriate coaching and mentoring to do so, and some form of measurement / accountability system.

As people of peace are identified, it will be important not to extract them out of their networks of relationships but to begin forms of discovery Bible studies with them in their sphere of relationships. In English culture, it may be judicious to use one of the forms previously mentioned (e.g., the talkingplace, the messyplace, the thirdplace café or some other mixed form which is both an access ministry and DBS). The DBS format, of course, is not only about content, but also about introducing basic DNA elements leading to a simple form of church. Appendix A shows how the discovery Bible study format and questions link to later essential DNA elements in a simple form of church. In terms of

²² Ripken, "Servants in the Crucible," 13-18.

content, however, because church planting and church multiplication movement proponents come at discipleship from a slightly different angle, there are differences in content even if essentially the same missional DNA is being sought. The CPM content begins with a predisposition that discipleship begins before meeting Jesus, and therefore uses a base of twenty-six studies initially focusing on eight attributes of God.²³ The CMM content begins with Jesus (and the seven miracle signs in John) with the predisposition that discipleship comes after meeting Jesus.²⁴ As to which of these may be the most appropriate fit for the current cultural climate or for a person of peace and family/affinity group, only field testing and experimentation will reveal.

A Focus on Making Reproducing Disciples and Developing Reproducing Leaders

David Watson identifies among his "counter-intuitives" of CPMs the "focus on a few" and the "go slow to go fast" principles.²⁵ In regard to discipling, these basics of "twos and teams" are particularly important, and will be applied in forms similar to Life Transformation Groups (LTGs). The original LTG model comes from Neil Cole. In this model, three practices are fundamental. First, repetitive reading of large portions of Scripture (thirty chapters weekly), character and accountability questions, and a form of Luke 10:2b prayer with specific individuals in mind.²⁶ A second model is that of a

²³ These attributes provide the background for seeing Jesus as the promise and fulfillment of God's redemptive plan. Paul Watson, Skype interview by author, Birmingham, UK, February 23, 2011.

²⁴ This predisposition also seems to be true of the T4T materials, developed from a CPM observed in Asia. See Steve Smith and Ying Kai, *T4T: A Discipleship Re-revolution* (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources, 2011), 223ff.

²⁵ David Watson, "Church Planting Movement (CPM) Counter-Intuitives," <http://www.murraymoerman.com/3downloads/cpm.asp> (accessed February 21, 2011).

²⁶ This is fully described in Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God*, 63ff.

method called "Church of Two."²⁷ This has dual aspects of listening to God and listening to another person in such a way that an emotional and spiritual healthy discipleship is promoted. The listening prayer component also reinforces and supplements the "treasure hunt" gospel sowing for men and women of peace. A third model is the use of SOAP (Scripture, Observation, Application, and Prayer), a tool which is already in use within the third place; it combines a format originally suggested by Wayne Cordeiro²⁸ and the "Three Column Discovery Bible Study" (or a variation, the "Four Column DBS") of church planting movements derivation (Table 7.1 shows the three- and four-column methods). There is a large degree of overlap between these, though each has their nuances. Field testing of these three approaches has been underway for several months. Crucially, each of these, rather than imposing missional living from external coercion, depends on growing intimacy and reliance on Jesus as a result of listening and exercising of faith to bring an inward compulsion to be missional. This does not eliminate the need to coach and mentor for reproduction, however, and this is something which will require forms of measurement as will be described in the following chapter.

²⁷ Lk10.com, "C02 - Church of Two," <http://www.scribd.com/doc/20072785/C02-Church-of-Two> (accessed February 21, 2011) provides a brief but informative article. See also Mark Virkler, *Dialogue with God* (South Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Pub., 1986).

²⁸ A sample of SOAP can be downloaded from <http://thethirdplacenetWORK.blogspot.com/>. See New Hope Christian Fellowship, "How to Journal: First Steps at New Hope," <http://www.enewhope.org/firststeps/journaling/> (accessed February 21, 2011).

Table 7.1: Three Column and Four Column Discovery Bible Studies²⁹

Four Column Study (God's Word, My Words, "I will," and "We will")			
Three Column Study (God's Word, My Words, and "I will")			
<i>God's Word</i>	<i>My Words</i>	<i>"I will . . ."</i>	<i>"We will..."</i>
Write out the passage word for word; will therefore read the passage seven to fifteen times.	My retelling of the passage.	Statements, each beginning with "I will," address personal application.	Statements beginning with "We will."
Slows one down long enough to "read" it.	No teaching or explaining, just retelling.	What will I do in the next 24 to 48 hours to demonstrate that I'm obeying this passage in my life?	What does it say about leadership?
In some cultures, writing in the pages of the Bible is disrespectful; this takes writing outside the actual pages of the text.	Complexity is a sign of misunderstanding.	Not "I should" or "you should."	What does this passage tell us about church planting?
	Do I really understand well enough to tell a child?	"Discovery" is a huge post-modern issue; how many post-moderns want to be told what to do?	How does this affect my organization?
	Checks one's personal understanding of the Bible passage.		

Figure 7.1 on the next page provides a visual representation of the processes involved in which progression of increasing responsibility and ministry roles depends entirely on one's level of loving obedience in discipleship. One of the deficiencies of this pyramid may be the appearance of "hierarchy" in terms of positional authority. However, imposing this hierarchical sense to the pyramid would be to overlook the essential understanding that progression in responsibility and spiritual authority (as described in Chapter 4) comes from personal experience with God, and the practice of CPM/CMM principles that are based on "discovery" and implementing what is discovered as a follower of Jesus who wants to show love and passion for God.

²⁹ Watson, Watson, and Robertson, "Church Planting Movements Training Conference."

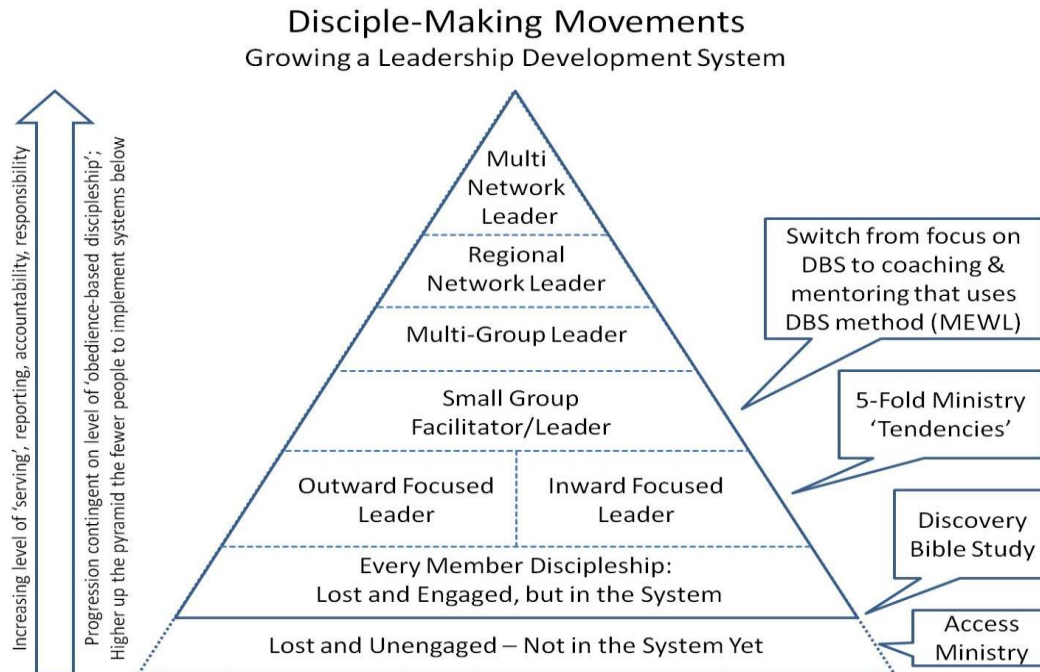


Figure 7.1: Paul Watson's Leadership Development Pyramid³⁰

What this means is that coaching and mentoring become essential processes along the progression from one level of responsibility to another, where progression is based on faithfully following Jesus in all that he asks.³¹ No one is "lording it over another" (Matt. 20.25-27), and there is a "flat" leadership structure. While forms of Life Transformation Groups are not included in this version of the Leadership Development Pyramid, it is not difficult to imagine how the peer relationships found at the base cellular level of "twos

³⁰ Coalesced from Paul Watson, "Making Disciples that become Movements" (Skype internet training, September 11, 2010), and Watson, Watson, and Robertson, "Church Planting Movements Training Conference." Watson described this pyramid with visual aids, but this rendition has been personally created. The acronym MEWL stands for model, equip, watch, and leave.

³¹ Not knowledge-based or insight based discipleship. "Insight-based is about discovering all the nuances of Scripture, but may not lead to obedience if insight is the goal. Most expositors and commentators are insight-based." David Watson, "Leadership Essentials - Kingdom Metrics," <http://www.davidlwatson.org/2010/09/09/leadership-essentials-%E2%80%93-kingdom-metrics/> (accessed February 22, 2011).

and threes" can provide opportunities of coaching and mentoring.³² Furthermore, natural and gifted leaders will also be showing up in this process before conversion, and may even be facilitating and starting new DBS forms of the third place before determining to throw their lot in with Christ as his follower.

Steve Addison writes that "Great leaders create opportunities that equip and mobilize others."³³ It is evident from the content of this chapter that a focus on seeing a church planting / church multiplication movement come into being depends entirely on the steps before, and will require much more than a single leader, however gifted or charismatic (and this writer is certainly not that gifted or charismatic). This endeavor to bring honor to God, extend his Kingdom reign, and play a role in a church planting and church multiplication movement will rise or fall on equipping and mobilizing disciples. From what has been outlined thus far, it is foreseeable that given enough listening and sowing, listening and people of peace, listening and forms of DBSs and LTGs, and so on, the roots of a movement can be nourished, though it is God who gives the growth (1 Cor. 3:7).

³² That is, a Life Transformation Group, Church of Two, and others jointly using SOAP or the Three-Column Study.

³³ Addison, *Movements That Change the World*, 101.

CHAPTER 8

EVALUATION AND PROGRESS ASSESSMENT: MEASURING FRUITFULNESS AND MOVEMENT

This final chapter sets out ways the implementation of this vision for a simple church network will be evaluated for progress in fruitfulness and movement. No attempt is made here to be exhaustive, but to identify base essentials of what needs measuring, and how. Unlike typical goal-driven ambitions which focus on human effort alone, much of what is described here focuses on removing barriers or fostering practices which allow the Divine-human partnership to thrive. Nothing formulaic can guarantee success, however it is measured, but there is a deep desire for fruit that endures (John 15:6).

Measurement and Evaluation for a Church Planting / Church Multiplication Movement

One CMF colleague shared the simple advice he had once received while church planting in Kenya among the Maasai. He said, to evaluate your ministry effectiveness and progress, ask, "What's been fruitful? Do more of that. What's not been fruitful? Do less of that."¹ Of course, this requires further elaboration as to what it means to be "fruitful."

¹ David Giles, meeting with CMF-Great Britain Field Team, Birmingham, UK, February 4, 2010.

Some churches, reflecting a return to a narrower focus on discipleship rather than programs and events, have defined their mission as "Make more and better disciples." That is what these pages are about, but also about more and better leaders, more and better simple churches, and more and better networks of simple churches. Yet, as helpful or inspiring such a mission statement may be, it also suggests that there should be some form of measurement, however elusive that may be. There is also a need for something more that does not set one off against the other. Mike Bonem hints at the tension sometimes created between the "more and better," and the "something more" when he states, "In the church, the 'bottom line' is life transformation, which defies simple cost-benefit analysis. We wonder whether it's better to see one new convert or five believers who grow significantly in their faith."² The view taken here is that all three are desirable outcomes: more disciples (leaders, churches, networks), better disciples (leaders, churches, networks), and transformation of people and communities.

Four definitions of a church planting / multiplication movement (CPM/CMM) were provided earlier in this paper. Garrison's definition focused on rapid multiplication of indigenous churches which could only be possible by God's hand. Watson's definition provided more specificity, particularly with regard to a minimum of 100 churches, four generations deep, within two years. Cole agreed, though he focuses on the necessity of multiplication at every level of church life, even if he does not suggest a time frame.³ As discussed in Chapter 4, and with the reservations noted there, and for the English context

² Bonem, "Good to Great to Godly."

³ See Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 2; Watson, "Church Planting Movement (CPM) - Our Definition"; and Cole, *Church 3.0*, 73. Cole has suggested it may take ten years to discern exponential growth and movement in the West. See Cole, "Are There Church Planting Movements in North America?"

in which the third place strategy is envisioned, Stetzer and Bird's definition will be tentatively adopted. This measuring stick of fruitfulness is designated here as a CPM/CMM: "a rapid reproduction of churches planting churches, measured by a reproduction rate of 50 percent through the third generation of churches, with new churches having 50 percent new converts."⁴ As noted in Chapter 6, a three year time frame will be used to look for the planting of third generation churches (and at least third generation leaders and third generation disciples).⁵ This may not be as rigorous a definition as used in other cultural contexts, but for church planting in England this would be no small feat. While one resists making the "numbers" the focus, it still stops one's breath to imagine over a dozen new and simple churches with seventy-five new baptized disciples, and many more experiencing and growing in Kingdom of God values.

A further question can be asked: "Is it realistic?" If the numerical goal at the end of three years is the focus, it is not. Even as this vision is imagined and brought before God as an impassioned plea, it must be said that measurement is about much more than bottom line numbers of individuals who "pray the sinner's prayer" or answer an altar call. "In our zeal for mass conversion and standard strategies," James Engel writes,

We overlook the fact that evangelism requires far more than effective methods. The gospel is not a consumer product to be marketed by drawing from a strategic toolkit. People come to faith in Christ through a uniquely personal process that takes place over time and is the result of multiple influences. Our message should

⁴ Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 5. This is equivalent to saying a church needs to plant a church that reproduces itself every two years with one-half being new apprentices to Jesus.

⁵ This also reflects a time frame consistent with David Watson's counterintuitive "go slow to go fast" concept. Paul Watson, in his coaching, looks in the first year for an extensive prayer network, access ministries (abundant gospel sowing), identifying people of peace, and starting discovery Bible studies. In the second year, he looks for at least two "indigenous" leaders to emerge from the emphasis on these four, and another two or three in the third year. David Watson, "Church Planting Movement (CPM) Counter-Intuitives," and Paul Watson, "Church Planting Movements Training Conference – Level 2."

be spoken by a changed life reflected in daily actions rather than by carefully honed words.⁶

Engel is speaking of measuring something here that is far more than numbers. A life of a person and the life of a community that is permeated with the leaven of Jesus cannot help but likewise permeate a relational network. Relaying a set of numerical figures simply will not get at measuring or describing this kind of community transformation.

Metrics: Measuring the Right Things

"Metrics" is a word that has recently entered mainstream language as a way to speak about measurement.⁷ In reference to CPM/CMM and applied here to the third place strategy, metrics has to do with three sets of measurements for the purpose of evaluation and assessment of success and fruitfulness. Using the shorthand reference mentioned earlier, the phrase "more and better" refers to those sets of measurements which have to do with quantitative metrics (the numbers) and qualitative metrics (the nature of what is represented in the numbers). A further set of measurements are "Kingdom Metrics." As with quantitative and qualitative metrics, Kingdom metrics is about asking the right kinds of questions from a biblical viewpoint that help define fruitfulness and success. This is really important, for as Paul Watson asks, "How do we talk about how to measure success in a way that leads to right activities rather than compounding frustration and

⁶ James F. Engel, "Getting Beyond the Numbers Game," *Christianity Today* 44, no. 9 (August 7, 2000): 57.

⁷ Edward Tufte, "Numerical Language," http://www.edwardtufte.com/bboard/q-and-a-fetch-msg?msg_id=0000uo (accessed February 26, 2011). While the prevailing opinion seems to see the word as focused on quantitative measurement, here it will be used more broadly as "sets of measurements."

feelings of failure?"⁸ It suggests there should be boundaries for appropriate accountability for those things upon which one can choose to act, and those things for which only God can choose and act. As Halter and Smay comment, "The pain of judging ministry success based on a [Western] report card is damaging to everyone."⁹ In contrast, a "gospel report card" tracks "transformation" and therefore "speaks more to the observable changes that take place over an extended period of time within a person, neighborhood, or nation."¹⁰

Two further comments need to be made about Kingdom Metrics, particularly because of the Church's recent unbalanced preoccupation with numbers. First, because God thinks so differently about life and eternity than his human creation, measurement cannot begin anywhere else but with Kingdom Metrics. The "inefficiency" of the incarnation,¹¹ Jesus' paradoxical stories and statements of Luke 15:3-7 and Matt. 18:12-14 (leaving the ninety-nine sheep for the one) and Matt. 20:1-16 (workers in the vineyard and the application that the first will be last and the last will be first), and Jesus' response to the inquiries of John's disciples (Matt. 11:2-6) are but three examples of why this is so. Inevitably, if measurement begins elsewhere, it will go badly wrong, as those of whom Jesus speaks in Matt. 7:21 will learn, that "Not everyone who calls me their Lord will get into the kingdom of heaven. Only the ones who obey my Father in heaven will get in." This suggests a second comment, articulated by David Watson, that "Kingdom Metrics is measuring our work by God's expectations as revealed in Scripture," and is "grounded in

⁸ Paul Watson, "Making Disciples that become Movements."

⁹ Halter and Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom*, 79.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Jonathan J. Bonk, "Mission by the Numbers," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35, no. 1 (January 2011): 2.

understanding how God measures what we do, resulting in our strategies and plans fulfilling God's expectations for what we do and how we do it."¹²

In being applied to the third place strategy, this means that questions of quantity, quality, and Kingdom of God affected transformation will be asked regarding disciples, leaders, expressions of the third place, and movement from forms of DBS to church. Here the attempt will be made to provide an overview of this accountability (coaching and mentoring) such that a tension is fostered, a "tension between the chaos and creativity of spiritual enthusiasm and the stability provided by effective strategies and structures" that contributes to a movement.¹³ For each of these, in addition, the focus of reporting and accountability is in stories. As Jim Henderson notes, "stories are the new statistics,"¹⁴ and it is stories, not numbers, which brings one to worship God for what he is doing.¹⁵

Figure 8.1 shows an inverse pyramid which visually represents the relative scale of reporting, accountability, and responsibility in this system. Similar to the leadership development pyramid of the previous chapter, this is not to be interpreted in terms of typical hierarchical and positional authority structures (even if the use of a pyramid to illustrate this may be an inherent weakness in the graphic). Instead, there is an unleashing of (decentralized) leadership in any apprentice to Jesus. Part of this is based in the processes previously described which encourage one to lovingly obey Jesus in all that he

¹² Watson, "Leadership Essentials - Kingdom Metrics."

¹³ Addison, *Movements That Change the World*, 107-108.

¹⁴ Drew Marshall and Jim Henderson, "Jim Henderson Interviewed on The Drew Marshall Show," Off the Map, http://www.podcastalley.com/podcast_details.php?pod_id=60291 (accessed January 16, 2011).

¹⁵ Watson, Watson, and Robertson, "Church Planting Movements Training Conference."

commands (whether it be from discovery of what God is asking in Scripture, or from discernment of what God is saying in listening prayer).

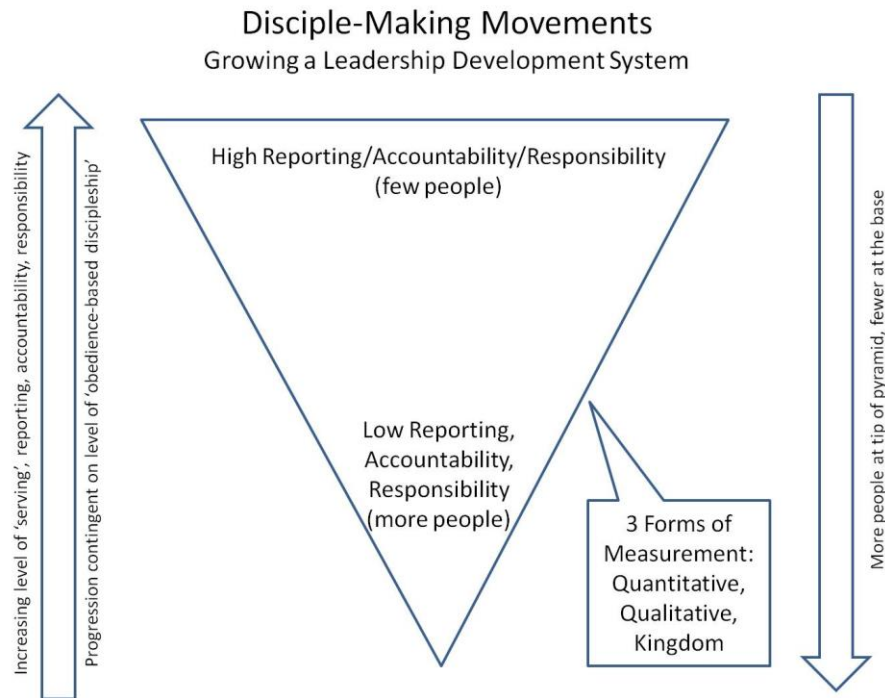


Figure 8.1: Paul Watson's Accountability and Reporting Pyramid¹⁶

Part of this unleashing is also based in what is meant by "accountability." Rather than a view which sees accountability with hierarchical overtones originating with a leader in positional authority, it begins with the apprentice(s) to Jesus. It is the apprentice(s) who articulate future action arising out of a desire to be lovingly obedient. Accountability is as effortless as another disciple or leader asking about what happened or how the action undertaken worked out.¹⁷ Coaching and mentoring, then, is the help

¹⁶ Coalesced from Paul Watson, "Making Disciples that become Movements" (Skype internet training, September 11, 2010), and Watson, Watson, and Robertson, "Church Planting Movements Training Conference."

¹⁷ Paul Watson, "Strategic Coaching" (Skype coaching conference call, April 12, 2011).

that this other disciple or leader provides to support the apprentice's effectiveness and fruitfulness in following Jesus.

Measuring Fruitfulness and Movement – Critical Elements

It is not possible, or even desirable, to be exhaustive in detailing all the questions or resources available for evaluation, particularly because of the fact acknowledged in previous chapters: a lack of personal experience in what is being sought. So, an attempt is first made to provide an overview of what ongoing evaluation might look like. In the following section, more specific applicability is made with respect to the third place with the elements of Chapter 7 in mind.

As to an overview of ongoing evaluation processes, this revolves around critical elements and phases of progression into a church planting movement, from which a matrix can be created for questions and analysis. Attention to these elements and phases helps foster the conditions or environment for a CPM, but do not guarantee it. Garrison and Watson, among others, argue from their support and analysis of CPMs that there are certain elements present in every movement. If one or more are missing, a movement does not occur or stalls. Garrison identified ten.¹⁸ Initially, David Watson identified twenty, but as understanding of church planting movements has grown, this has now settled at twenty-three in three primary categories.¹⁹ The "phases" include transition points between the phases. Six transition points have been identified, but these have been

¹⁸ Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 171ff.

¹⁹ David Watson, "Church Planting Essentials - Critical Elements," and Paul Watson, "Making Disciples That Become Movements."

coalesced into a focus on five phases.²⁰ Appendix B shows and explains the twenty-three critical elements; Table 8.1 illustrates the critical elements and phases, with two marked for discussion.

Table 8.1: The Strategy Process: Phase Questions for Twenty-three Critical Elements of a CPM²¹

	<i>Critical Element</i>	<i>Phases</i>				
		Access Ministry	People of Peace	Discovery Bible Study	Church (thethirdplace)	Leave
<i>Kingdom Elements</i>	Prayer	x				
	Scripture			x		
	Disciples					
	Obedience					
	Communities of Believers					
	Authority of the Word and the HS					
	Persecution					
	Spiritual Warfare					
<i>Tactical and Practical Elements</i>	Groups/Teams					
	Plans and Accountability					
	Access Ministries					
	Person(s) of Peace					
	Relational Network					
	Appropriate Evangelism					
	Reproduction					
	Reaching out					
<i>Leadership Elements</i>	Redeem the Local Culture					
	Inside Leaders					
	Outside Leaders					
	Self-Supporting					
	Educate to increase knowledge base					
	Train to increase skill sets (coaching)					
	Equip to increase capacity (mentoring)					

²⁰ The original six are access (to a silo or people group), finding a person of peace, relationship of trust with a person of peace's family or affinity group, moving to a DBS, formation of a church from the DBS, and reproduction. From Watson, Watson, and Robertson, "Church Planting Movements Training Conference."

²¹ Paul Watson, "Church Planting Movements Training Conference – Level 2."

There are three central points to highlight from this matrix. First, it provides a means to ask questions of and by any person or team evaluating strategy and movement, appropriate for a culture. For instance (where x marks the spot on Table 8.1), one might ask the questions, "What does prayer look like in the access phase of your ministry for your culture at this time?" (prayer and access ministry) or "Tell me about your DBS Scripture passages and practices that are helping the group move into becoming church" (Scripture and DBS). Second, the role of a church planting catalyst is to coach people in the critical elements and phases through the transitions, and not do it for them. This is especially necessary when the coach is an outsider to the culture of a relational network or people group; contextualization remains the task of the insider(s). Third, the replies to these questions come in the form of stories and illustrative conversations because these are the only way to describe what is going on, and qualitative and quantitative measurement come in the stories. The intent is not to control, but to serve individuals, teams, and communities at their level of need and discipleship in a kind of "just in time" coaching and mentoring.²² Significantly for my personal leadership in the embryonic thethirdplace network, and in relationship to other simple church networks nationally, monthly coaching in this way has been very helpful.

Measuring Fruitfulness and Movement – thethirdplace network

What has just been described is a kind of macro view that provides a means to evaluate overall progression and movement. Besides this, it is also necessary to provide a

²² Coalesced from Paul Watson, "Making Disciples that become Movements" (Skype internet training, June 26 – September 11, 2010), Watson, Watson, and Robertson, "Church Planting Movements Training Conference," and personal reflection and prayer with thethirdplace vision in mind.

more specific means of evaluating what is happening in growing thethirdplace as a network of simple churches. Table 8.2 displays a review and evaluation grid from the discussion of the following paragraphs.

Table 8.2: The Strategy Process: Coaching and Mentoring Questions Matrix

Coaching or Mentoring Relationship	<i>Listening Prayer</i>	<i>Prayer Networking</i>	<i>Abundant Sowing & Access Ministry</i>	<i>People of Peace</i>	<i>DBS Forms</i>	<i>thethirdplace DBS</i>	<i>thethirdplace</i>
<i>DBS Facilitator or DBS Initiator</i>							
<i>Coach or Church Planting Coach</i>							
<i>Church Planter</i>							
<i>Team Leader or Catalyst</i>							
<i>Network Leader or Regional Leader</i>							

There is no pretense here that what is outlined in the table above and in the following pages is in any way refined or adequately developed, or how much would survive field testing (since most of this still lies outside of the realm of personal experience). It seeks consistency with what has been considered in previous chapters conceptually on a general basis, but especially with the more detailed material of Chapters 6 and 7 containing the description and goals of thethirdplace and thethirdplace

network. Furthermore, similar to what has been stated in regard to the vision for the thirdplace network, it only represents my best understanding to date. The intent is to supply a broad description of areas of measurement and evaluation. These focus on the coaching and mentoring relationships with questions surrounding prayer, abundant gospel sowing (access ministry), finding and accessing relational networks with people of peace through discovery Bible studies, and maturity to a simple form of church.

Appreciable overlap exists between these areas. All factors considered, this does present a significant challenge to keeping it simple and straightforward. It will in all likelihood be some time before simplicity on the other side of complexity is found in these areas for coaching and mentoring. Some practices, forms, and questions will probably confuse rather than resource the vision. Field testing over the next twelve months will provide more clarity about which should be modified or eliminated.

Listening Prayer to Join God in Mission

There are two primary spheres of questions to be asked in reference to listening prayer. One sphere has to do with those practices revolving around forms of discovery and discernment in Scripture. This is both an individual and a corporate endeavor. Practices falling into both spheres include forms of SOAP or Three-Column Discovery Bible Studies which have a more focused examination on a passage.²³ Another form includes the broader reading of thirty chapters a week in LTGs.

The other sphere has to do with discovery and discernment in prayer. This also has corporate and personal dimensions. Creative listening ideas which have been

²³ Leaders will also be using the Four-Column Method to discover together what God may be saying to the thirdplace network for the corporate community's connection with what God is doing.

explored personally or in community can feature here, "treasure hunts" being one of them. "Church of Two" practices also offer opportunities for listening prayer, with the distinct advantage of intentionally linking listening practices between an individual and small community.

Finally, and not to be neglected, are questions around aspects of intercessory prayer. The LTG "strategic prayer focus" reflects and models the Luke 10.2b virus, and offers a practice that is simple and reproducible. Questions about how intercessory prayer is being exercised in wider networks are also important.

Access Ministries and Abundant Gospel Sowing

Overlap becomes immediately apparent here. Evaluation in this area involves questions about creative listening practices such as treasure hunts. However, these questions are nuanced toward learning how these practices help the third place both serve and gain entry into new relational networks or groups. Further, in this regard, are questions about the inherent nature of the access ministry / abundant gospel sowing practices. The coach or catalyzer will be looking for stories about the attractional or missional quality of the event(s) or practice(s).

People of Peace and Discovery Bible Studies

Access ministries and abundant gospel sowing, apart from being activities intended to bless and care for others, are also undertaken with the expectation that God will bring people of peace to the third place's attention. Appropriate coaching and mentoring questions will help the third place community keep an eye out for these people and their relational network(s). Additional questions will focus on navigating the

transitions, especially in regard to establishing new discovery Bible studies in a form appropriate to the person(s) of peace.²⁴ Because the person of peace may be dechurched or unchurched as well as "never-churched" in this Western culture, one form may be better than another, but it is hard to ascertain until further experience is gained. What is proposed may also be too confusing, and also requires further testing and experience.

With respect to each form of discovery Bible study (the "pure" DBS form of CPM derivation and those which are adapted for use in the thirdplace network) come questions about practice and implementation. That is, there are questions to ask of the facilitator or individual taking the initiative to start a DBS about what DNA is being established, the reproducibility of the form, and selection of Scripture passages for discovering how to be aligned with God's plans and purposes. Finally, the coach or church planting catalyst will be looking for stories about how those in the discovery Bible study are responding in loving obedience to Jesus, and if any of these people are keen to initiate a DBS among their natural relational networks.

Toward Mature Forms of the thirdplace: A Simple Church

As with the previous practices and phases, there are many kinds of coaching and mentoring questions which can be offered, maybe as many as the stories that will be told in response. Those for consideration here revolve around the progression from a form of DBS to a form of the thirdplace DBS to a mature form of the thirdplace (that is, a progression to being "church" as defined earlier). The concern here is to walk with the facilitator / leader through the life cycle of what is a simple church plant, even if that

²⁴ That is, a discovery Bible study, Church of Two, Life Transformation Group, SOAP, or Three-Column Study.

person (or couple or group) does not have any idea of what is happening or what is intended. Questions, therefore, will involve the DNA as it progresses (or not) between these stages of the life cycle, but also about what is happening in the people. Other sets of questions will involve baptism, communion, and covenanting together as a missional simple church (thethirdplace) with other simple churches (thethirdplace network).

For the Future

Time, experimentation (field testing) and experience will be indispensable to establishing the validity of much that has been described in this chapter. Personally, this is as far forward as I can see at the moment. While some might be able to anticipate and plan for further development than has been set out here, there is plenty of listening and work to pursue, personally and corporately, that will occupy the months ahead. With cautious optimism, what is offered here will hopefully provide the foundation for next steps that will similarly require monitoring and evaluation for fruitfulness and effectiveness.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Two purposes have come together in this Final Project, which wraps up all that has been previously studied and put into practice during these eight years. First is that academic purpose which serves to demonstrate theological reflection on one's personal and professional life in ministry. Second is a deep desire to participate in Jesus' mission "to look for and to save people who are lost" (Luke 19:10), and be fruitful and effective in doing so in a post-modern and post-Christendom matrix. As Ed Stetzer comments, "The question is not whether the church will reach postmodern people. Clearly, Jesus promised that the church and the gospel will prevail. The question is actually, 'Will we (and the traditions we represent) be the groups that reach postmodern culture or will God have to bypass us and use others?'"¹ The planting of thirdplaces and thethirdplace network represents a life decision not to be bypassed. It expresses a heart cry to partner with the Father as a follower of Jesus under the direction and power of the Spirit in his redemptive mission to enfold people of the United Kingdom into the Kingdom of God.

This project has sought to describe the historical and cultural context generally in Western culture and in its nuanced form particular to England. It has argued that

¹ Ed Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), xvii.

understanding the unique mix of English post-modern and post-Christendom culture, and the response of the Church for the last twenty-five years, is helpful to contextualizing a simple form of church that emerges out of loving obedience to Jesus and missional engagement with the culture. It has provided a theological and biblical base for this engagement with an overview of forms of discipleship, leadership development, and church that one endeavors to be simple and reproducible, even if that has not yet been achieved. It has freely borrowed from the lessons of recent church planting and church multiplication movements to propose the thirdplace concept with the belief it can contribute to such a movement in the UK. What remains is to faithfully persevere in implementing this plan, evaluating and modifying as necessary as the strategy fleshes out over the next three years.

Despite what has been confidently stated in the previous three chapters, feelings of trepidation and passion to see this come to pass remain. This is very much a work in progress, and is only my best understanding to date of Jesus' call to follow him and abandon my own agenda to his. It will already be out of date by the time this is printed off for binding and catalogued into the Fuller Seminary library. Nevertheless, it builds on Dallas Willard's observation in mentoring others in discipleship that "recognizing God's voice is something they *must learn to do through their own personal experience and experimentation*."² This has been a tremendously liberating idea, and has ongoing application in my spiritual life and the outworking of the thirdplace vision. This sentiment, in part, has been expressed by one of our thirdplace family: "the thirdplace / A

² Willard, *Hearing God*, 108-109. The emphasis is in the original.

place to explore / A place to experiment / A place to ask those questions / You always wanted to ask / But never dared / A place of community / A place of discovery"³

If there is any confidence, it is not in the systems and plans explored in these pages. Instead, it is in the leadership of God: Father, Son, and Spirit with life lived as a prayerful expression of loving obedience. It is a prayer that what is vain and temporary in these pages will pass away, and what is divine and permanent will stand as testimony to the greatness of this Triune God in the form of men, women, youth and children who reproduce themselves as disciples in simple forms of church. As Tennyson said far better, "Our little systems have their day; / they have their day and cease to be: / They are but broken lights of thee, / And thou, O Lord, art more than they."⁴ The prayer sentiment of Brennan Manning also finds appropriate expression here:

May all your expectations be frustrated.
May all your plans be thwarted.
May all your hopes and dreams be withered into nothingness
so that you may sing and dance in the Kingdom of God
Who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁵

This Final Project and all its forthcoming permutations is therefore released to God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – as the Apostle Paul instructs: "God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going to work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering" (Romans 12:1, The Message Paraphrase); and so may it be.

³ Karen Urwin, "thethirdplace" (read in thethirdplace, Shirley, Solihull, November 5, 2010).

⁴ Lord Alfred Tennyson, "In Memoriam A.H.H.," Poets Corner - Bookshelf, <http://theotherpages.org/poems/books/tennyson/tennyson01.html> (accessed January 17, 2011).

⁵ Jim Smith, "Spirituality and Ministry" (DMin seminar, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, June 16, 2005), who credits Brennan Manning, without supplying the source.

APPENDIX A

Discovery Bible Study Questions and DNA Elements

Table A.1: Discovery Bible Study Questions and DNA Elements¹

<i>Question</i>	<i>DNA Element</i>	<i>Comment / Observation</i>
What are you thankful for?	Prayer, Worship	As group members determine to follow Jesus, they come to understand that thanksgiving should be directed to God.
What is stressing you out?	Intercession	Introduces prayer for one another.
What do you need to deal with the stress?	Ministry	God uses his people to answer prayers of lost and saved. Being attentive to needs shows people we are there to love them because God loves them.
What are the needs of the people in our community?	Ministry	God uses his people to answer prayers of lost and the saved. Meeting needs shows people we are there to love them because God loves them.
How can we help each other with the needs we expressed?	Ministry	Develops care and community with each other.
What did we talk about last week?	Accountability	Builds expectation that follow-up from previous weeks will be normal.
What did you change in your life as a result?	Accountability, Obedience	Puts discipleship focus on obedience, not knowledge
With whom did you share the story?	Accountability, Worship	Transformation in lives and communities brings worship; it is "bringing our obedience to the altar."
We identified several needs last week and planned to meet those needs. How did it go?	Accountability, Worship	Provides debrief opportunity and sharing of stories; both successes and failures
Read passage of Scripture	Scripture	Makes Scripture the locus of community learning
Can someone retell the passage in their own words (like you would to a friend)?	Accountability, Evangelism, Replication	Provides opportunity to "rehearse" and embed the story in a natural fashion
Do you agree with the retelling? Anything added or left out?	Priesthood of Believers, Group Correction	Elevates importance of understanding a particular passage without additions/subtractions.
What does it say about God? What does it say about people?	Scripture, Discovery, Priesthood of Believers	Scripture is central to everything we do, but an "expert" is not required; reading and discovering what it says (individually and corporately); no one stands between you and God.
If/Since this is from God, what will/must you change?	Discovery, Obedience	Moves people from insight to obedience. "Insight" does not bring change/transformation/discipleship.
Who will you share this with before we meet again?	Evangelism	David Watson's definition: "Evangelism is a discipleship process of going from not knowing Christ to people lovingly obeying him."
When are we going to meet again?	Obedience, Personal Decision	God loved me by showing me mercy, I love God by showing him obedience (personal choice); shows commitment to community.

¹ Coalesced from Paul Watson, "Making Disciples that become Movements" (Skype internet training, August 28, 2010), and Watson, Watson, and Robertson, "Church Planting Movements Training Conference."

APPENDIX B

Critical Elements of a Church Planting Movement

Table B.1: Twenty Three Critical Elements of a Church Planting Movement²

	<i>Critical Element</i>	<i>Descriptions / Questions</i>
<i>Kingdom Elements</i>	Prayer	Simultaneously mobilizing groups inside and outside of a culture to seek God for a people group and workers/laborers from the harvest for the harvest
	Scripture	No curriculum for teaching, but a list of questions to aid "discovery" of truths to obey
	Disciples	Make disciples of Jesus, not converts to religion
	Obedience	Model and call for obedience to Jesus (the Bible), not doctrine
	Communities of Believers	Discovery Bible Studies (DBS) are the means to establish churches in a cultural group where disciples are nurtured and grown
	Authority of the Word and the HS	All that is required for the task is an obedient partnership with Jesus
	Persecution	Direct and indirect opposition on the human level
	Spiritual Warfare	Preparation for and response to direct and indirect demonic or evil activity that comes from extending God's activity and rule
<i>Tactical and Practical Elements</i>	Groups/Teams	Never alone; working as a community together brings more advantages than what can be done alone
	Plans and Accountability	Intentional structures for reporting to celebrate God's activity and evaluate successes and failures; quantitative, qualitative, and Kingdom (transformation) forms of measurement
	Access Ministries	Meeting local needs as a prelude to evangelism; as a byproduct builds relationships and helps identify people of peace
	Person(s) of Peace	Search for people who provide entry into networks of relationships
	Relational Network	Evangelize households / families / affinity groups
	Appropriate Evangelism	"Evangelism is the intentional calling of families to study God's word and leading them to fall in love with Jesus"; determining most culturally appropriate means
	Reproduction	Organic life reproduces – disciples, leaders, churches; if there is no reproduction then are you a disciple? A leader? A church?
	Reaching out	Prayer, practices and plans to penetrate every segment of society
<i>Leadership Elements</i>	Redeem the Local Culture	The Gospel and its application by insiders dictates what is challenged and redeemed
	Inside Leaders	Ministry/leadership by insiders, who contextualize CPM concepts
	Outside Leaders	Introduce deculturalized concepts for contextualization by inside leaders; practice MEWL (Model, Equip, Watch, Leave)
	Self-Supporting	Leaders are not paid or given other material resources by outside sources; bi-vocational or resourced for ministry by local church
	Educate to increase knowledge base	Teaching to share information as a supplement to obedience-based discipleship
	Train to increase skill sets	Coaching for skills to catalyze movements
	Equip to increase capacity	Mentoring for ongoing transformation

² Paul Watson, "Making Disciples that become Movements."

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